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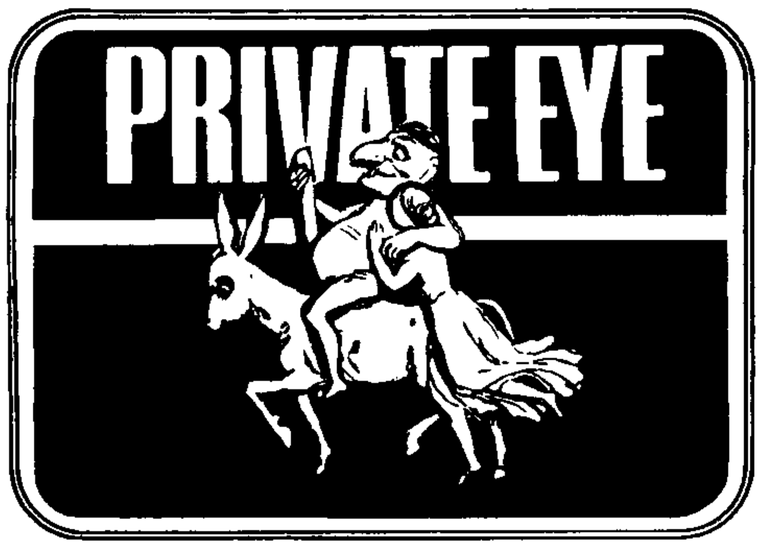

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"I'm a new-style Tory leopard"

"YOU can hardly catch sight of Tony Blair in the *House of Commons* these days," George Galloway wrote in the Scottish *Mail on Sunday* last February.

"Despite speaking at more than a thousand public meetings since 9/11, I am present almost every day. Blair has the worst attendance record of any Prime Minister in modern history… But he can frequently be spotted on the sofas of daytime TV." Galloway was particularly scornful of "an excruciating excursion by the prime minister of Great Britain on the *Richard and Judy* show, in which he participated in a quiz to identify a knickerless Sharon Stone crossing and uncrossing her legs."

Blair might be rightly mocked for putting the chat show sofa ahead of the Commons benches, but Galloway's own record is even worse. Since the general election he has spoken in only four Commons debates, compared with Blair's 22. He has voted in just 18 divisions out of a possible 122.

True, this is slightly better than the PM (15 divisions), but he does at least have the excuse of running the country. If you discount those who aren't allowed to vote (the speaker, deputy speakers etc) the only other MP to have entered the division lobby less often is Rachel Squire – who is dead.

No doubt George will use his next *Mail on Sunday* column to explain why his decision to spend several weeks away from parliamentary business with the cross-dressers and tabloid slappers of *Celebrity Big Brother* is quite different from Blair's Sharon Stone moment.

SO Defence Secretary John Reid was prepared to deliver the ultimate insult to taxpayers when he confirmed the scandalous sell-off of Qinetiq, the Ministry of Defence's research arm, last week (see *Eyes passim*).

As a trough of institutional investors and venture capitalists line up alongside the US private equity Carlyle group to make massive profits from the partial flotation, taxpayers or private investors are banned from cashing in. According to Defence Minister Lord "Smallpox" Drayson, they are considered too stupid for the "complex" sell-off and the necessary explanation needed for a British Telecom or British Gas type sale was deemed too costly and complicated.

But why would anyone have expected better from government which from the outset has

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ABC

RUTH KELLY LATEST

scandalously mishandled the breaking-up in 2001 of what was the Defence Research and Evaluation Agency to form Qinetiq and its sister agency, the Defence Scientific and Technology Laboratory (DSTL)?

Eye readers will recall that Carlyle paid a mere £42m for management control and a third share of Qinetiq, in an outrageous privatisation deal that actually cost the taxpayer double that amount in legal and advisory fees. Carlyle, which also managed not to take on any responsibility for any expensive environmental liabilities, had been expected to pay at least three times that figure. Then it immediately started capitalising by selling off thousands of acres of former military training grounds, target sites, tank lands and air strips for housing.

Now thanks to the £1.1bn flotation, Carlyle is expected to see its stake rise to a massive £340m in less than three years – half of which it is expected to sell-off, making a neat £170m. And all – à la Mapeley STEPS fiasco – conveniently held in the secretive tax haven of Guernsey. Executive chairman Sir John Chisholm is expected to make £24m from his initial £129,000 stake, and Graham Love, the chief executive will score around £18m in this, his second defence public sector buy-out. This makes a neat £42m profit for the two men on shares they awarded themselves when the taxpayer received, er, £42m from Carlyle for a 34% stake of the whole company.

All this comes on top of the serious questions about the wisdom of selling off to any investor all our sensitive defence-related inventions – from anti-missile programmes to guided weapons.

DAVE'S RAVES (PT 94)

SPEECH by David Cameron to the Centre for Policy Studies, 8/11/05: "In short, we need to campaign for capitalism. To promote profit. To fight for free trade. To remind, indeed to educate our citizens about the facts of economic life."

Article by David Cameron in the *Mail on Sunday*, 1/1/06: "I don't believe in 'isms'. Words like communism, socialism, capitalism and republicanism all conjure up one image in my mind: extremism."

WHAT a surprise that Tony Blair's son Euan has found a work experience placement with the City spin doctors, Finsbury.

Roland Rudd, the Finsbury founder and friend of Peter Mandelson, has been cosying up to "new" Labour for many years. In 2001 Finsbury's party guests also included the present Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell and Education Ministers (and peer) Andrew Adonis, as well as the then Labour party boss, also since ennobled, Lord Triesman.

Finsbury previously hired the former private secretary of the Dear Leader's close pal, the Lord Chancellor Lord Falconer. Such contacts and support for Labour events at conference time perhaps helped merit the 2002 contract to advise then Transport Secretary Stephen "Liar" Byers over the Railtrack collapse.

So look out for the pay-off… most likely to come for such a selfless act as explaining to Blair the Younger the dark arts of being paid to lie...

NEWS FROM THE SANDPIT

EVIDENCE of direct Iranian involvement in attacks on British troops is not confined these pleasant corners of southern Iraq.

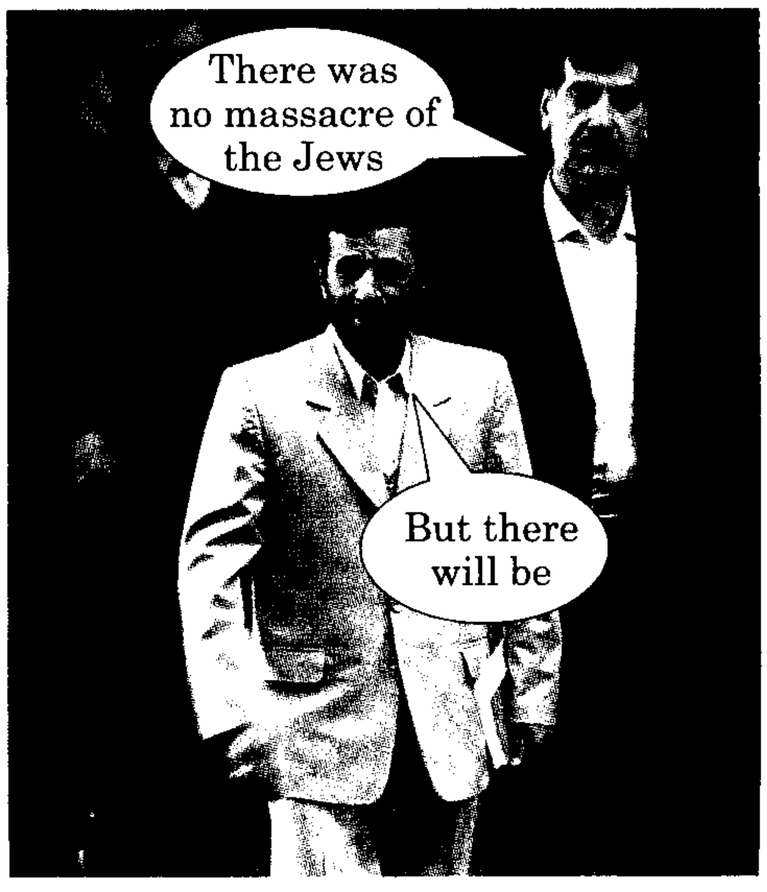
The word from the "putting stickers on maps" brigade – aka The Intelligence Corps – is that Tehran is also providing weapons and training for Jihadistas in Afghanistan, just in time for the deployment of our lads there later this year, both regulars and reluctant part-timers from the TA.

The withdrawal of 2,500 Spams (a nickname for American troops) cheered local Taliban lunatics so much they immediately instituted a successful recruitment drive in Iran, Saudi Arabia and Bradford, fully aware that the British effort in Afghanstan will be fatally split between a war on drugs (upsetting local war lords and allies in the war against terror) and a war on terror (upsetting Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a terrorist with a hotline to Damascus and Tehran) encouraging an engagement on two fronts, with the MoD briefing newspapers of casualties on a Falklands War scale.

Meanwhile members of the "coalition of the willing" against terror, like the Dutch and the French, continue to limit their commitments to a minimum, leaving the lads with a massive task to complete with minimum backing from the MoD and with crap kit and crap rules of engagement.

'Square Basher'

IRAN DENIES HOLOCAUST



NEWS

FORMER SAS chief Sir Michael Rose hit the headlines last week by calling for Tony Blair to be impeached over Iraq – "a war that was to unleash untold suffering on the Iraqi people and caused grave damage to the west's prospects in the wider war against global terror".

No doubt there is something in Rose's case that Blair should be called to account for "what has transpired to be a blunder of enormous strategic significance". But the general may not be best placed to make that case given his own disastrous record as head of the UN protection force in Bosnia in the 1990s.

Under Security Council resolution 836, Rose was mandated to "deter attacks against the safe areas". Yet when Serb artillery launched a fierce bombardment against the safe area of Gorazde in April 1994, he did nothing, claiming that the attack was merely a "minor" and "tactical" operation which had "no serious intention".

"If this is 'not serious', I hope I don't see a serious situation develop," one UN monitor complained to Rose. "Saying it is a minor attack into a limited area is a bad assessment, incorrect and shows absolutely no understanding of what is going on here."

While Rose stood idly by, scores of people were killed and hundreds wounded. He compounded the offence by blaming the Bosnian troops defending Gorazde for not fighting hard enough – and then claimed, falsely, that most of the damage to Gorazde had been caused by the Bosnians themselves.

In his thunderous indictment last week, Rose stopped short of suggesting that Britain should pull out of Iraq. Indeed he said that "adequate security" would be essential if Iraqi democracy was to endure. This of course has nothing to do with the fact that Sir Michael is a director of Control Risks, a large private security and consulting group which has seen its profits quadruple since 2003 thanks to lucrative contracts for protecting corporate and diplomatic staff – as well as sites such as oil fields and airports – in, er, Iraq.

HEADS of Oxford colleges were startled to receive a letter last week from the university's vice-chancellor, John Hood. Its message? He thought they would like to know that he is separating from his wife.

Hood has been full of surprises since he arrived from New Zealand in October 2004. The first shock was his appointment itself – the first non-Oxonian vice-chancellor in the university's history. He had spent most of his career as a businessman down under before becoming vice-chancellor of the University of Auckland.

Given his background, it was perhaps rather less surprising that as soon as he came to Oxford he should announce his intention of running the place like a business. He issued two "green papers" riddled with management-speak about performance appraisals, best practice and corporate governance. Many dons were aghast: last May a meeting of congregation, the university's parliament, rejected his proposals by 351 votes to 153.

Then came another surprise. There was a vacancy for a new registrar, the university's top administrative post. The lucky appointee, who has just arrived in Oxford and is due to start work next month, is one Julie Maxton from the University of Auckland – a former colleague and close friend of John Hood. Even some of his supporters wonder if this really constitutes "best practice".

What bombshell will he drop next? Watch this space.

Street Of Shame

"Eighty-three percent of callers to our You The Jury voteline do NOT think Barrymore should appear on *Big Brother*," an outraged *Sun* announced on 5 January.

Of course they don't. It's the wrong programme. Back in May 2004 the paper threw open its phone lines and invited readers to vote for "the sensational line-up *Sun* readers would like to see in the next series of *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!*" Barrymore came top.

HE MIGHT be a lying, drug-taking alcoholic who has always refused to answer questions about how a man ended up dying in his swimming pool with severe anal injuries – but what really offends the *Daily Express* about Michael Barrymore is his lack of respect for the royal family.

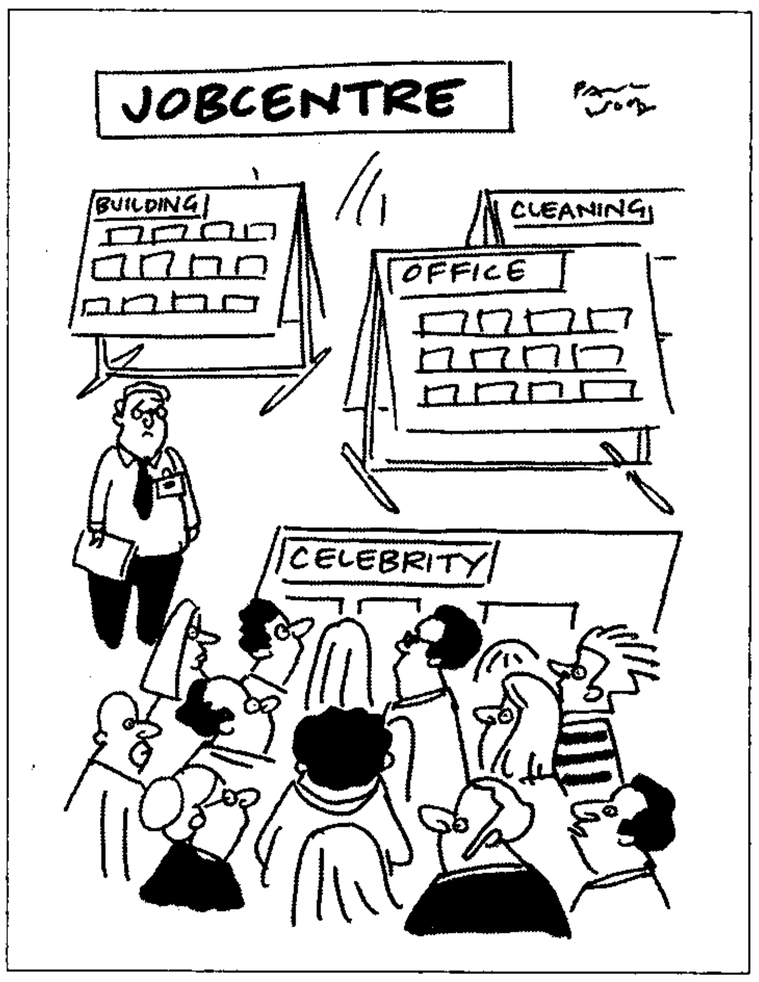
"Barrymore Insults The Queen," shrieked the front page of the paper on 7 January, over news that "in a new low for British viewers [although presumably not those who were watching *Lesbo Chicks do Boy Girl* at the time on the *Express*'s sister channel Television X], he was seen defacing a portrait of the monarch by poking her eyes out with a lemon squeezer during *Celebrity Big Brother*."

Barrymore was in fact investigating a hidden camera which the *Big Brother* producers had hidden inside the royal portrait – an offence which the *Express* evidently considers far more treasonous than, say, implying on a weekly basis that Her Majesty sanctioned the murder of her daughter-in-law, a sport which the paper duly returned to on Monday 9 January, with a front page devoted to the "Diana 'Death Squad' Riddle".

REBEKAH WADE once again showed her sure touch as editor of the *Sun* with last Friday's front page splash, "Lotto Rapist is Shearer's Neighbour". She revealed the alarming news that Iorworth Hoare, who bought a winning lottery ticket while on weekend leave from jail two years ago, owns a home a few streets away from that of the Newcastle footballer Alan Shearer, separated by a mere 24 other properties.

As the paper reminded readers: "A judge once told Hoare: 'Every moment you are at liberty some woman is at risk'… Hoare is reported to have an unhealthy interest in elderly women". As Shearer is a 35-year-old man, the paper was unclear as to the exact danger he might find himself in.

No doubt Rupert Murdoch will be delighted by the work of the five-strong team it took to bring in the scoop – and in particular, the expense of hiring a helicopter to get the aerial photographs that were necessary to actually cram both Hoare and Shearer's home into the same frame.



"THE wait is over," the *Daily Mail* whooped last week as it announced the return of millionaire gorblimey specialist Richard Littlejohn. But after reading his inaugural column some at the *Mail* were not quite so jubilant.

Littlejohn began with a shot across the bows of the Tory leader. "Cameron is the invention of a coterie of privileged, thirtysomething scribblers. I think of them as the Alice Band, because they're all either called Alice or married to someone called Alice. Notting Hill is their very own Alice Springs."

The only prominent Alice in Cameron's Notting Hill Set is *Telegraph* hackette Alice Thomson. And the Cameroonie who is married to this "someone called Alice" is Edward Heathcoat Amory, a political commentator who works for… the *Daily Mail*.

To compound the offence, Littlejohn also put the boot into the Chancellor of the Exchequer. "Hardly anyone bothers to question Gordon's fitness for the highest office. Why the hell not? The defenestration of Gordon Brown is long overdue." One place in particular where no one dares question Gordon's fitness for high office is the *Daily Mail*, largely because editor Paul Dacre is a great chum and admirer of the Iron Chancellor. Only last year the paper spiked a Peter McKay column because it was too rude about Brown. Fortunately Dacre was on holiday in the British Virgin Islands last week: it remains to be seen if Littlejohn will be allowed any further salvoes of that sort once he returns.

Having attacked one of his senior colleagues and his editor's dear friend, Littlejohn then rubbished his paper's news judgment by claiming "the idea that a bird flu epidemic is heading for Britain is about as credible as Tony Blair's 45-minutes-from-Armageddon warning in the dodgy Iraq dossier" – on the very day the *Mail* itself had a shock-horror splash warning that "Britain is wide open to infection by the deadly virus".

You couldn't make it up!

PAUL DACRE is said to be "cunting furious" at the recent spate of defections from the *Mail* to the *Telegraph*, of whom the latest is features executive Liz Hunt.

But he thought he had at least one victory. Thanks to a hefty pay rise and a new title of "deputy political editor", lobby hack James Chapman did a last-minute U-turn over a move to the *Telegraph*. A jubilant Dacre claimed he'd put one over on his old colleague John Bryant, now editing the *Torygraph*.

Dacre may be rather less jubilant when he hears how Bryant plans to fill the Chapman-sized hole in his political staff: by hiring Graeme Wilson – another lobby hack from the *Daily Mail*!

***OBSERVER* editor Roger Alton has an unfortunate habit. Like his namesake Roger Mellie (the Man on the Telly) he's unable to utter more than a sentence or two without saying "fuck" or "cunt" – as he demonstrated in several media interviews last week when discussing the super soaraway new Berliner format.**

Hacks at the paper were therefore amazed to receive this memo from their editor last Friday: "Sorry if this is a bit pots and kettles, but reading proofs over the last couple of days I have noticed about 3 'fucks' or 'fuckings'… used not in quotes but in general prose. Can all section editors make sure that doesn't happen? Really sorry. Roger."

If he feels so strongly about it, will he now lead by example? No fucking chance.

GREAT MINDS...

"IF James Blunt seems drippy next to the rock stars of yesteryear, he is positively macho by comparison with the Kaiser Chiefs. These are the weeds from Leeds whose hit single was 'I Predict A Riot', a tale about the bourgeois apprehension of a chap who tries to get a taxi on a Saturday night in the centre of town. 'Watching the people get lairy/It's not very pretty I tell thee/Walking through town is quite scary'... The self-respecting British punk rockers didn't get up on stage and start whimpering about how they predicted a riot. They incited riots. 'White riot, I want a riot, a riot of my own,' they sang, if my memory serves me correctly." – Boris Johnson, *Daily Telegraph*, 12 January 2006.

"The Kaiser Chiefs recently had a big hit with 'I Predict A Riot'. Its lyrics could have been written by Tessa Jowell... It goes: 'Watching the people get lairy/It's not very pretty I tell thee/Walking through town is quite scary'... The Kaiser Chiefs' view of city centres as a riot waiting to happen is pure New Labour, and it's a far cry from when punk rockers The Clash sang 'White Riot' in the late 1970s. That song expressed envy that only black kids got to riot: 'White riot, I wanna riot, a riot of my own!' it went." – Brendan O'Neill, *Spectator*, 15 October 2005.

WHEN listeners of Radio Four's *Today* programme put EU President José Manuel Barroso at the top of a poll to find the most powerful man in Britain, it was the cue for the Eurosceptic *Daily Mail*, not usually a fan of anything to do with the Beeb, to salute *Today*'s chattering class listeners.

Stephen Glover hailed them as "a knowledgeable and well-informed band". A *Mail* leader proclaimed that "listeners to the *Today* programme have struck a mighty blow for robust common sense".

Whoops! Two days later it emerged that the poll had been effectively distorted thanks to a concerted effort by UK Independence Party supporters to push nominations for Barroso. Whether these were the well-informed, knowledgeable people Glover had in mind is not yet known – the *Mail* chose not to cover this development.

THE HOT favourite to succeed Robert Thomson as editor of the *Times* has long been the paper's business editor, Patience Wheatcroft. Maddeningly, however, Thomson seems disinclined to quit.

Now Patience's patience may be wearing thin. "Leaving the stage while the crowd is still clamouring for more is a talent rarely exhibited outside the theatre," she wrote on 6 January, praising James Crosby of HBOS for doing just that. "His decision should inspire a few other chief executives to look at their positions and wonder whether it would not be better to withdraw while they are winning." True success, she added, is accomplished by handing over a thriving organisation to a capable successor who is "keen to get on with the job".

Geddit?!?

SPORTS management company IMG must have been delighted by the 900-word interview with its client, golfer Nick Dougherty, that appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* last week.

Under the headline "Top Ryder Cup prospect is enjoying living the dream", Lewine Mair paid tribute to Dougherty's marketability: "Tommy Hilfiger, if the £1m they are purported to be paying is correct, will find him good value, not least because Nick considers himself blessed that IMG should have landed him such a good contract."

Dougherty's agent at IMG, Michelle Mair, won't have any difficulty getting in touch with the *Telegraph* golf hack to offer her thanks. A quick phone call to mum should do it.

Private Eye Cover 2002
The original is in the collection of, yes, a Mr and Mrs C. Kennedy

TONY BANKS was, the *Daily Mirror* declared the morning after his death, "Labour's Witty Man of the People".

"The popular ex-MP was known for his wit and sense of fun," the paper reported, and to prove it, it provided 11 of his best *bon mots* in a handy cut-out-and-keep guide to "the Wisdom of Tony", including – at number ten – his comparison of former Tory leader William Hague to a foetus in a speech at the 1997 Labour party conference.

It was, then, presumably another *Mirror* which demanded on its front page at the time that the Prime Minister "SACK THIS CLOWN". The joke was, the paper pointed out, "grotesque and sick... and left gaffe-prone Mr Banks fighting for his political life. Anti-abortion groups demanded Mr Banks be sacked. The *Mirror* agrees. He should go."

AS MANY newspapers noted following Charles Kennedy's swift defenestration, rumours of his excessive drinking had been circulating in the media for years – reaching a crescendo when *Newsnight*'s Jeremy Paxman brought the topic up during an interview in July 2002.

They were, however, less willing to recall their own reaction to the incident at the time. The *Daily Mail* declared itself "astonished" by the "series of intrusive questions". The *Sun* termed it a "Paxo booze rant". The *Express* – a paper with some knowledge of indecent behaviour on late night TV – claimed it had "sparked fresh claims that the corporation is dumbing down".

"Mr Paxman asked three questions on Mr Kennedy's drinking habits. The presenter has subsequently acknowledged he asked a question too far. He should have been more contrite. It was three questions too far," thundered the leader column of the *Independent on Sunday*, while the *Observer* urged Paxman to "raise your glass, and the tone of *Newsnight*, Jeremy."

In the *Guardian*, Polly Toynbee took the news particularly badly – "a privacy barrier broken last week with Jeremy Paxman's brutish questioning of Charles Kennedy about his drinking habits... the point about these barriers is that once broken, they stay broken. It's no use Paxman apologising afterwards, the damage is irreparable."

When Iain Duncan Smith (remember him?) quipped in his party conference speech the following year that "Charlie Kennedy wants to raise taxes even further... except on wines and spirits, of course", the *Guardian* was even more upset. It was, the paper's leader column thundered, "a crude smear on Charles Kennedy of which the Tory leader should be roundly ashamed".

PRESS GANGS OF NEW YORK

INTERESTING developments in the case of Richard Martino, the American mobster and former acquaintance of Richard "Dirty" Desmond.

Martino, aka "Richie from the Bronx", was sentenced to 54 months in jail by a Kansas court last week for his part in an $8.9m telephone fraud. The district judge said he had planned to give Martino an eight-year stretch but "confusion over sentencing guidelines" prevented him from doing so. He added, however, that the judge presiding over a companion case in Brooklyn might wish to correct this "unduly lenient" punishment by adding another 10 years to Martino's sentence.

In the Brooklyn trial, reported in *Eyes* 1126 and 1127, Martino pleaded guilty to conspiring to extort more than $1m from Dirty Des in 1992. This was the sum which Martino and his associate Norman Chanes had spent advertising phone-sex services in Des's British porn magazines. They suspected he was ripping them off by producing vastly inflated circulation figures for the mags, and in September 1992 they flew to London to demand a full reimbursement. Desmond refused. "You're fucking with us," Martino snarled. "This isn't over."

Indeed it wasn't. Two weeks later, on a trip to New York, Desmond's managing director Philip Bailey was kidnapped by a gang of mafia hoodlums who pistol-whipped him, slashed his face and applied an electric cattle-prod to his testicles. "We want our money back," they warned him. "You tell your fucking boss..."

Even after Martino's guilty plea last year, Desmond was continuing to insist that the story of Bailey's ordeal in New York was "a fantasy". His denials have gone unchallenged, largely because Bailey himself has never spoken publicly about the incident.

Until now, that is. Before Christmas the Brooklyn federal judge Carol Amon held a series of hearings to help her decide if Martino deserved a maximum sentence – and the first witness on the stand was Philip Bailey. During his testimony, which went unreported in Britain, he started weeping as he described the savagery of his beating.

Almost as distressing, however, was the unsympathetic reaction of Desmond when Bailey was well enough to return to London. "Oh, you don't look so bad," Dirty Des allegedly told him – whereupon Bailey "jumped across a table" and tried to assault the grinning porn baron. "I felt like a cat cornered in a room," he told the court. "I wanted him as a boss to help me as a human being." Some hope. Bailey resigned in disgust a month later and had to sue Desmond for severance pay.

Meanwhile, Martino may yet have the last laugh. In his guilty plea last year he admitted threatening "to damage Richard Desmond's Northern and Shell business if Desmond or any Northern and Shell employees ever attempted again to do business in the United States". And Dirty Des's attempts to do business in America do seem to have been jinxed ever since. His $100m investment in a US edition of *OK!* magazine, launched five months ago, is disappearing fast: in a desperate attempt to boost sales, the mag is about to slash its cover price from $3.49 to $1.99.

Desmond complains that *OK!* is the victim of "dirty tricks" by American rivals. "We used to think we were devious," his sidekick Paul Ashford said recently, "but compared with these Americans we're babes in arms." No doubt the hapless Philip Bailey would agree.

APOLOGY OF THE YEAR

"In our October 14 2005 issue we published an item purportedly about Mr Andrew Trotter, the Deputy Chief Constable of the British Transport Police. Unfortunately, our reporter was misled into believing that he had met Mr Trotter in a Soho pub. In fact, it was not Mr Trotter in the pub at all and it follows that Mr Trotter did not make any of the statements we attributed to him."

– West End Extra

LIB DEM SPECIAL

CHARLES KENNEDY was criticised for lying about his drink problem. But what of his political colleagues when they were asked about it?

Paul Marsden, the former Labour MP turned serial defector who at the time of the notorious Paxman interview with Kennedy in 2002 was sitting on Mr Kennedy's side of the House, wrote to the *Guardian* to assure the newspaper that "the night I joined the Liberal Democrats he drank just one whisky all evening in his flat".

So it must have been an entirely different Paul Marsden who last week picked up a hefty fee from the *Mail on Sunday* for the lurid tale of how "within hours of defecting from Labour to the Lib Dems four years ago, I came face-to-face with the reality of his sickly mental and physical condition."

Back in 2002, other colleagues also rushed to defend Kennedy. Interviewed by the *Independent on Sunday* in September, Kennedy's frontbench colleague Dr Evan Harris MP was emphatic: "It's rubbish. I am the health spokesman of the party and no one has ever discussed with me those questions, which is why I dismissed them. Westminster is a gossipy place. I would have got to hear about it because I get to hear about everybody else's ailments."

Kennedy's admission of alcoholism must also have come as a huge shock to Mark Oaten, the Lib Dem home affairs spokesman, who was interviewed on 19 December last year by Andrew Marr. "I must ask you this very directly," said Marr. "There's another former MP who says that he's seen first hand, serious evidence that Charles Kennedy does have a drinking problem. Have you ever seen any such evidence yourself?"

"No," Oaten replied. "What I've seen – and remember I've been very close to Charles, I was his PPS – is somebody who at close quarters works extremely hard, diligently, gets on with the job in hand."

Marr tried again. "So you've never seen any such problem. No drinking problem at all?" Oaten was emphatic: "No, I'm very confident that Charles is absolutely up for the job and having worked very closely with him I believe that what he now wants to do is to put this week behind him."

And what of frontbencher Sandra Gidley MP? The beginning of the end for Kennedy, as we now know, came on 13 December last when she declared at a shadow cabinet meeting that she had "real concerns" about his drinking and his leadership, which had "not been resolved". Yet only a few weeks earlier, in a piece for her blog about the "very positive" Lib Dem party conference, Gidley had written: "The bizarre thing was the debate about the party leadership… It's a non-story because there is no great discontent among the party so we can only assume that as the press had to talk about something then they just mirrored the debate that is going on in the other two parties. Hardly original." Not original, but true.

However, perhaps the fiercest grilling Paxman received over the drink interview occurred when he appeared before the Oxford Union PPE Society in November 2002. Repeatedly questioned about the incident, he eventually admitted: "After the Kennedy drinking question, I went home that night and worried that it had not been legitimate." The interviewer who forced this confession out of him? One Daisy Sampson, former spin doctor to Kennedy, and the woman who (under her married name MacAndrew) this month broke the story on ITV News that her ex-boss was an alcoholic.

SIR Menzies "Ming" Campbell exudes gravitas, integrity, statesmanship – at least if you believe the profile-writers. Actually he is as adaptable as any other politician.

Take the question of his leadership ambitions. During last year's general election, accompanying Sir Ming on the campaign trail, Marie Woolf of the *Independent* mentioned the Westminster gossip that he would be the most suitable candidate to succeed Charles Kennedy.

"As an experienced and reassuring figure, he would make an able caretaker leader," she wrote, "until the next generation find their feet in the Commons. But Sir Menzies refuses to entertain such notions. 'Any conceit that I might have had about that is long since gone,' he says, almost regretfully. Would he rule it out indefinitely? 'I rule it out,' he says."

In fact, so disloyal was Campbell as Kennedy's deputy that as long as six years ago he was confiding his doubts to a Downing Street spin doctor. In his diaries Lance Price records on 6 March 2000: "I spent this evening at Mike Brunson's farewell at ITN, which was a good party. It was fun to chat to a few Tories for a change and to Menzies Campbell, who clearly has little time for Charles Kennedy. He said, 'We're still waiting to hear from Charlie what the strategy is'."

Ah yes, the Ming-fanciers say, but at least he had a good war. No discussion of Iraq on *Newsnight* or the *Today* programme is complete without Sir Ming boasting that he got it right all along. As he wrote in the *Observer* last year: "The facts are undeniable. We were taken to war on a flawed prospectus. There were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. There was no serious and current threat, no real and present danger." He added that "none of us should be surprised" by this. Except perhaps Sir Ming himself.

If you turn to Hansard for 24 September 2002, just after publication of the "45-minute dossier", you can see what he said about this flawed prospectus at the time. After denouncing Saddam as an evil tyrant who was a real danger to both his own citizens and "the people of other countries", the great statesman declared: "...we can also agree that he most certainly has chemical and biological weapons and is working towards a nuclear capability. The dossier contains confirmation of information that we either knew or most certainly should have been willing to assume." Saddam's possession of chemical and biological weapons, he concluded, had been "eloquently demonstrated by the dossier".

SOME newspapers have derided John Hemming, the Lib Dem MP for Birmingham, Yardley, for making public his ambition to succeed Charles Kennedy as his party's leader. They point to the fact that the millionaire businessman only entered parliament last May, and that within weeks of becoming an MP, a Sunday newspaper revealed that his researcher was pregnant with his child.

Hemming's wife was quoted as saying she wasn't very pleased about this, but had got used to it, as this was approximately the 26th affair her husband had had since they married.

Curiously, the coverage so far has neglected to mention another of the bicycle-riding, piano-playing outsider's accomplishments. As well as being a very enthusiastic shagger, John Hemming is also a terrific piss-artist.

At a *Private Eye* lunch at the Coach and Horses, Soho, in June last year (barely a month after being elected) Hemming got "hog-whimperingly drunk" before telling the assembled company – most of them complete strangers and journalists – about his pregnant mistress, *before* the story had broken in the newspapers (*Eye* 1135).

With the thirst of Charles Kennedy and the libido of Paddy Pantsdown, surely Hemming is the ideal man for the job!

THERE are no drinking and shagging stories about Mark Oaten, MP for Winchester and one of the serious candidates for the leadership of the Lib-Dems (if that is not a contradiction in terms).

But beneath that bland PR man's exterior lurks a turbulent nature. Oaten scraped into parliament in May 1997, beating Tory Health Minister Gerry Malone by just two votes after several recounts. Matters had been confused by a nuisance candidate called Richard Huggett, who won 640 votes by standing as "Liberal Democrat Top Choice For Parliament". More than a few of those votes had probably been intended for Oaten.

At 5am, at a stage when Oaten believed he had narrowly lost to Malone, he approached Huggett at the count and declared: "Huggett, you bastard, I'm going to fucking kill you." Happily for Oaten, and for Huggett's safety, further recounting gave Oaten the seat. (Following a legal challenge by Malone, the election was re-run in November 1997, and Oaten romped home with an 21,500 majority – despite the best efforts of Huggett, who stood this time as a "Literal Democrat" but only managed to attract 59-odd confused electors.)

THE emergence of a fourth candidate for the Lib Dem leadership, Chris Huhne, left the *Guardian* struggling to find out who on earth he was.

It described Mr Who-He as "a relatively unknown new MP". How odd. For most of the 1980s Chris Huhne was economics editor of… the *Grauniad.*

GAMBLING NEWS

THE race is on to run the one "super casino" allowed under the Gambling Act (along with the 16 other smaller ones).

Off to a flying start is Millennium Dome owner Philip Anschutz, who paid US prosecutors $4m four years ago to settle allegations that he awarded work from his firm Qwest Communications to bankers in return for shares in companies they were promoting. Now he's desperate to fill his big tent with roulette wheels and fruit machines.

Recent parliamentary questions from Tory MP Malcolm Moss have revealed that one week at the end of October, Anschutz had dinner on consecutive nights with Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell and Sports Minister Richard Caborn – the first hosted by Anschutz's PR agent and friend of Jowell, Matthew Freud.

When Moss asked whether other would-be super casino operators would be given similarly high access, Jowell told him that "I attended a dinner at which Philip Anschutz was a guest. He certainly talked to me about casinos, but got absolutely no information that was not freely available in the newspapers". So that's all right, then.

Meanwhile other casino companies, including all the British ones, have had to settle with meeting junior ministers and officials over coffee and biscuits.

PS: Last summer Tessa Jowell appointed a new special adviser: one Sara Latham, formerly of Freud Communications.

"How do I know Ruth Kelly hasn't let Bird Flu into the school?"

GREEN GROW THE TORIES-O

ONE of David Cameron's first moves on becoming Tory leader was to set up a Quality of Life Policy Group to spend 18 months developing a new, greener environment policy. The group is chaired by former Environment Secretary John Gummer "backed up" by new Tory parliamentary hopeful Zac Goldsmith, editor of the *Ecologist* magazine.

There was scepticism from the outset about how the pair would get on, especially given their divergent views on nuclear power (Goldsmith is dead against; Gummer – who has the Sizewell plant on the edge of his Suffolk Coastal constituency, likes to be considered "thoughtfully pro-nuclear").

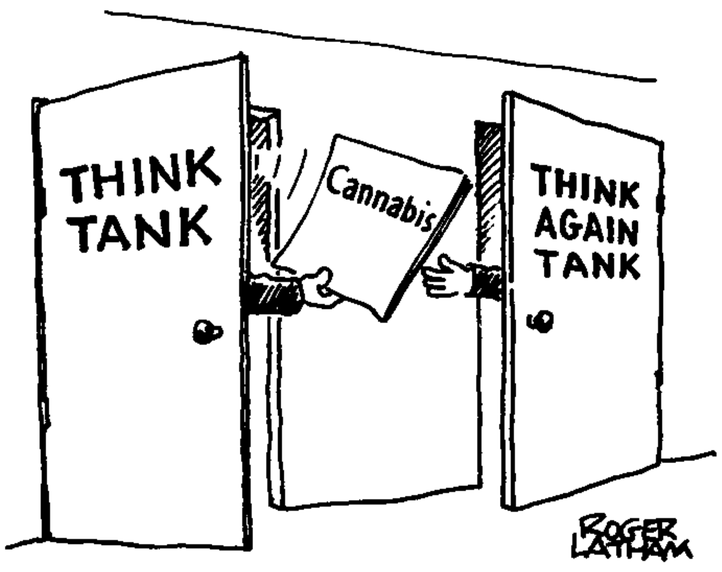
But this isn't the only issue likely to cause acrimony. Goldsmith's *Ecologist* has been championing a campaign by the organization Karma Banque to drive down the share price of the Coca Cola Company. Karma Banque, the brainchild of green activist Max Keiser, organizes "smart boycotts" of companies it considers unethical, and at the same time sells the company's shares short, inviting hedge funds to pile in and do the same. Every time the company's share price drops, Karma Banque collects a profit, which it pledges to use to help the world's poor.

Goldsmith has been scathing about Coca Cola's activities in India, accusing the company of forcing people to travel eight miles a day to find clean drinking water, and says he thinks Karma Banque might be able to wipe close to £2bn off Coca Cola's market value. Karma Banque certainly seems to be having an effect. Last week Goldman Sachs adjusted its rating for Coca Cola downward, forecasting reduced demand in Europe. And to whom can the rattled soft drinks manufacturer turn for help as its stock values tumble? Step forward Sir John Gummer, chairman of Coca Cola UK's environmental advisory board.

Of course John "Beefburger" Gummer has other business interests which make him an ideal choice for Cameron's environmental policy team. For example, he is also on the payroll of the French utility conglomerate Veolia Environnement, formerly Vivendi, as chairman of its water operations. Its sister company is none other than the controversial waste firm Onyx – a regular on the Environment Agency's pollution hit list.

In 2004 two of its UK incinerators were named in the infamous top 20 producers of hazardous waste. A year earlier it was fined £10,000 for breaching waste rules. And in March 1999, just over a year after Gummer joined Vivendi, the Environment Agency listed Onyx as number two in its Hall of Shame table after it was fined £95,000 for losing some radioactive material while demolishing its Birmingham incinerator. (It is now in dispute with green campaigners over plans to build new ones.)

Veolia Water says it has little to do with its sister company. But as the debate rages over hazardous emissions from incinerators, the fact that they deter people from recycling, that burning rubbish is seen as a waste of natural resources, we have to ask: will Gummer's review of Tory policy please those who pay his board salary or the green lobby?



Down on the Farm

ONE of the mysteries of our age is why Margaret Beckett (aka Rosa Klebb) and her colleagues at the Department for the Elimination of Farming and Rural Affairs devote such ingenuity to working out how to destroy Britain's farming industry. Their latest target yet again is Britain's beleaguered meat industry; their weapon as usual being the peculiar way in which they apply various EU directives.

For centuries, one of the most useful by-products of producing meat has been the substance known as tallow, the fatty residue which remains when all those parts of an animal which cannot be eaten or put to other uses are rendered down to powder by fierce heat. Tallow has been put to a wide range of uses, from making soap to cosmetics and pharmaceutical products. It can even, when all else fails, be burned as a highly effective fuel, and the rendering industry has long used it to fuel its own thermo-oxidising boilers, so that one cow provides the heat needed to render down the next.

An additional advantage of this process, in our global warming-fearful age, is that tallow as a fuel is "carbon neutral", in that it puts out no more carbon into the atmosphere than the grass the cow eats has taken out of the air in the first place. In terms of saving the planet, therefore, one would expect Rosa and her fanatically eco-conscious acolytes at Defra to welcome the use of tallow as fuel, since it makes its own small but valuable contribution to assisting them to meet their much-prized Kyoto and EU targets for cutting back on carbon emissions.

But this is not to reckon with the abject worship accorded by Rosa and her colleagues to the EU's waste incineration directive, 2000/76. So anxious are they to apply this directive's requirements as often and as rigorously as possible that, unlike almost any other country in Europe, Britain has chosen to classify tallow not as a fuel but as "waste". As from this month, therefore, any rendering plant which wants to continue burning it must pay £300,000 for special equipment. This is to ensure that the tallow (made from grass) does not emit into the atmosphere all those metals and other pollutants the waste directive is designed to save us from.

So costly is this equipment that it makes it no longer economically viable to use tallow as a fuel. Instead the rendering plants (and therefore the cattle farmers and ultimately us the consumers) must now pay an additional £5 per animal, totalling millions of pounds a year, for the tallow to be buried in holes in the ground, or taken to dedicated incineration plants where it can simply be burned without serving any useful purpose.

Of course countries such as France, Germany and Italy aren't so daft. By continuing to classify tallow as a fuel rather than as waste, they will be saving themselves and their farmers millions of pounds, thus enabling them to export their meat more cheaply to Britain.

But the final twist is that UK rendering plants must now buy in fossil fuels such as oil to replace the tallow, thus hugely increasing their emissions of CO_2 (an average plant, says Stephen Woodgate of the UK Renderers Association, "will be putting 15,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide back into the atmosphere each year"). For Rosa and her chums, when it comes to choosing whether they would prefer to save the planet or destroy Britain's farmers, there is no contest.

'Muckspreader'

Number crunchings.

£53.71 ■ Amount by which Sylvia Hardy underpaid her council tax in protest at above inflation increases last year, for which she was jailed

£870 ■ Amount by which John Prescott underpaid his council tax annually for eight years, for which he has apologised

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THE European parliament's head of building services Pierre Parthoens, responsible for multi-million euro building projects in Brussels, has been suspended from work after it was discovered that he is under investigation over corruption charges.

Parthoens is one of 12 defendants accused by state prosecutors of bribing a Belgian official in relation to a motorway tunnel project in Liege, in East Belgium, in his previous job. He does not deny the charge which could see him given a four-year suspended jail sentence, but claims he was only doing as he was told by his (since deceased) boss.

Parthoens was quietly suspended in November after the parliament's Secretary-General Julian Priestley learned about the criminal investigation – Parthoens apparently hadn't thought he ought to mention the small matter to his current bosses until October. Disciplinary proceedings have also been opened.

Hans-Martin Tillack, the investigative journalist who exposed the story in German magazine *Stern*, has been quick to point out that EU anti-fraud body Olaf has already investigated Parthoens, who has been an official at the European parliament since 1998, twice before.

In January 2002 questions were asked about possibly exaggerated payments to contractors involved in the new European parliament building in Brussels. The investigation was soon shelved, with Olaf chief Franz-Hermann Bruner saying no irregularities had been found.

In March 2002 Parthoens's €7,500 "foreign service allowance" for the mere 15 days a year he worked in Luxembourg was also called into question, but again ruled to be okay. However, according to Tillack, an internal report described Olaf's supposed probe as a "show investigation".

The EU institutions don't much like Mr Tillack's reporting of such matters. Two years ago his working documents were taken in a police raid in Brussels following his exposure of the Eurostat scandal (*Eyes passim*).

EU-phemisms

I am using the word 'not' in its loosest possible sense

Celebrity Big Brother (C4)

THE original *Celebrity Big Brother* was part of Comic Relief in 2001, and like the special versions of *EastEnders* and *Have I Got Buzzcocks All Over* that book-ended its finale, it was meant to be a spoof of a familiar format.

Its small cast – all of whom protested loudly, and in some cases fairly convincingly, that they were only taking part for charity – were figures of whom even the least frequent flicker through *OK!* had some knowledge, and there was a genuine interest in finding out whether they would live up to our preconceptions. Was Anthea Turner really vile enough to sell her own wedding for the price of a chocolate bar? Was Vanessa Feltz truly that self-obsessed? And could Chris Eubank really keep up that ridiculous charade 24 hours a day?

The same cannot be said of the house's subsequent celebrity inmates, who have approached the show in exactly the same way as the nonentities who fill the house each summer, each convinced that this is their once-in-a-lifetime chance to make or break their careers.

To be fair, a lot of them are starting off from about the same level: an actress who was in *Baywatch* a couple of years after people stopped watching it and two members of bands who first had hits in 2004 are signings so unspectacular that Channel 4 was forced to make a joke out of it by inserting a genuine "non-celebrity" to compete with them. Luckily, however, they had a trio of aces up their sleeves: three star signings each with something to prove to the public: Jodie Marsh, Michael Barrymore and George Galloway.

Marsh declared she wanted to demonstrate that the media had got her all wrong, an admirable tactic sadly undermined by the fact that she actually is a potty-mouthed slapper. Barrymore, still yo-yoing in and out of rehab and there to seek "closure" on the swimming pool incident, was obviously intended by producers to play the part Les Dennis performed in the show's second series in 2002, an on-screen "nervous breakdown" which has been elevated to the status of reality TV classic through endless repetition on countdown shows, despite the fact that at the time it was confusing (it only emerged after he left the house that his marriage to Amanda Holden was coming to an end), and rather dull, consisting as it did of endless footage of a man sitting in a garden staring into space.

Barrymore, however, is a man whose public falling-apart has been going on for at least a decade, and the entertaining bits happened years ago, mostly at award ceremonies and in the days when he was still allowed on proper telly. All that is left for *Big Brother* is the muttered recitations of therapy-speak and regular descents into tears that make most recovering addicts tedious company, punctuated by disturbing episodes of pop-eyed derangement (mainly directed towards Marsh) which were aggressive enough to make even his most ardent apologist nervous about taking a dip with him.

And then there is Galloway. In a statement released at arm's length by a grimacing Respect Coalition, he claims to have taken part "to attempt to connect with the politically untouched, the millions, most of them young people, who are completely turned-off by conventional approaches" – a resounding success, with 23-year-old Preston nominating him for eviction five days in on the grounds that "he doesn't seem to get on with young people" and the Radio One breakfast show christening him a "pillock".

Faced with his housemate's total indifference – "I thought they would ask me what the House of Commons was like", he bitched at one point, failing to realise that even Chantelle would be bright enough to put that question to someone who actually went there occasionally – Galloway has been reduced to delivering his lectures on the Iraqi people's undying love for Saddam to his only receptive audience, 57-year-old Rula Lenska, who also had to comfort him after his failure to be voted most famous resident despite the fact that "virtually every Muslim in the world knows who I am". Since they now also know he spent the feast day of Eid Al-Adha in a house with two homosexuals, a transvestite and the former hostess of the Fantasy Channel's "Live and Turned On", pretending to lick cream off an actress, this year's biggest reality TV success will go to whichever company manages to get a camera into Galloway's next meeting with Mohammed Naseem and the other charming figures who stump up the cash for his political aspirations.

Like Germaine Greer before him – and like every wannabe with a demo disc who has entered the non-celebrity *Big Brother* over the past six years – Galloway made the classic error of convincing himself that he could rise above the *Big Brother* format, and that his own personality would prove stronger than the one its editors decided to assign him. He should have reflected on the fact that Greer is not remembered for leading a revolution against the "fascist" Big Brother and walking out of the house. It's the fact that she was dressed as a medieval milkmaid when she did so.

'Yoof'

BIG BROTHER, I SALUTE YOUR INDEFATIGABILITY...
IT'S THE X LIST FACTOR
I'M A NON-ENTITY - GET ME OUT OF HERE
ANY OF YOU BOYS FANCY A DIP?
Ian Pyne

AD NAUSEAM

SO FAREWELL, then, Golden Wonder, which two weeks ago went in to administration. Golden Wonder brands, including NikNaks, Ringos and Wheat Crunchies, were the mainstay of a generation of packed lunches and the company also claimed to have invented the epoch-defining Ready Salted and Cheese and Onion varieties.

Golden Wonder blamed its demise on "Golden Balls", aka Gary Lineker, who has fronted more than 50 spots in a long-running ad campaign for Walkers, during which time Walkers, Golden Wonder's arch-rival which is owned by PepsiCo, has come to dominate 57 percent of the market.

Embittered NikNak fans can at least take comfort in the knowledge that Walkers is having a tough time of it too, with recent concerns over child obesity leading to a decline in sales and prompting a raft of knee-jerk new product developments including low-salt, low-sugar and baked snacks.

But where does this leave Golden Balls? Lineker's advertising, where an adult acts like a child, is plainly designed to appeal to kids, and Walkers was singled out in 2004's House of Commons health committee obesity report for "deliberately undermining parental control" with its advertising. A ban on celebrity advertising to promote junk food still looms large after a DoH advisory document in November said that: "Role models for children should not be used to endorse nor promote products [high in fat, salt or sugar]" and a DTI consultation paper released a month later went so far as to suggest that companies who encourage children to nag their parents for junk food could face criminal charges. With his £1.5m deal up for renewal this year, suddenly Lineker's famous "No More Mr Nice Guy" slogan is sounding rather poignant.

PRIME Minister Harold Wilson planned to survive a nuclear war by taking refuse in a bunker under Corsham.

Gazette & Herald, Chippenham

JUST FANCY THAT!

● "I used to think popular television couldn't sink deeper than *Big Brother*. But that was until I stumbled upon ITV's tawdry *Celebrity Love Island*... It is gratuitous, voyeuristic drivel. The best-known contestant is Abi Titmuss, who was filmed having three-in-a-bed sex sessions with disgraced ex-boyfriend John Leslie. Also there is Rebecca Loos, who, after claiming to have had an affair with David Beckham, now seems to have found romance with Calum Best... At which stage of our evolution did such behaviour lead to being classed as a 'celebrity'?" – George Galloway, *Mail on Sunday*, 5 June 2005.

● "Following Galloway's performance before the senators, a common reaction has been, 'Whatever you say about him, he was bloody good.' So an unexpected consequence of the accusation may be he'll now be sought after as a contestant on reality shows." – Mark Steel, *Independent*, 19 May 2005.

MEDIA NEWS

"They've damaged my ears! When I take them out I hear weird sounds... traffic... birdsong... voices!"

DUMB BRITAIN

The Wrekin Wrangler, BBC Radio Shropshire

Matthew Carr: What was the destination of the Mariner 9 space probe?

Caller: Plymouth.

Steve Wright's Big Quiz, Radio 2

Steve Wright: Which brothers made the first powered flight in North Carolina in 1903?

Contestant: Erm, the Boeings?

Richard Allinson *(standing in for Wright)*: Name the eccentric politician who has resigned as editor of the Spectator to concentrate on his political career with the Conservatives.

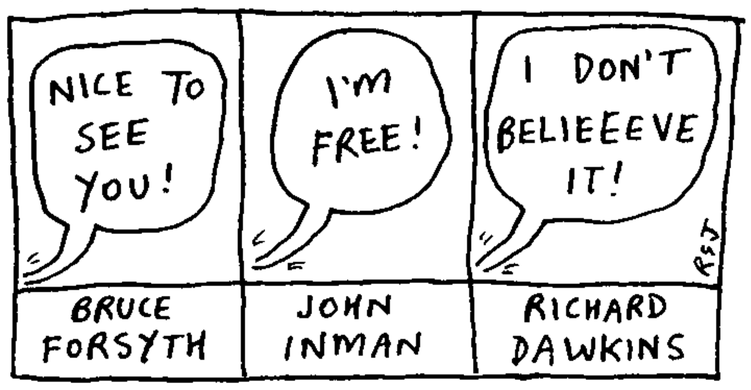
Contestant: Boris Yeltsin.

The Chappers & Dave Show, Radio 1

Mark Chapman: What do you call the fat on a whale?

Contestant: Chewing gum.

Famous TV Catchphrases



LUVVIES

"To me, I want to work towards bursting into a ball of light and flying off the planet. It sounds psychotic, but honest to God, at its very best I am literally Saturn."

JIM CARREY
MX (Sydney)

Submitted by Tony Barrell.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

SATANIC PANIC

THE appalling damage done to 20 children separated from their families – for up to ten years – in Rochdale in 1990 by social workers with an "obsessional" belief in satanic abuse was revealed in a powerful BBC1 *Real Story* documentary last Wednesday.

The social workers Jill France and Susan Hammersley and their bosses were caught up in a professional panic that children were being sexually abused by devil worshippers in bizarre black magic rituals, including drinking blood and sacrificing animals and children.

The notion spread in the US and the UK in the late 1980s and early 1990s through satanic abuse survivor stories in the born-again Evangelical Christian movement and into mainstream child protection circles through literature and the conference circuit. The scare led to around 80 satanic abuse investigations in the UK, including the notorious Nottingham and Orkney cases (see *Eyes passim*). Police found no corroborating forensic evidence and a government inquiry in 1994 concluded it was a myth.

In October 2003, on the Scottish island of Lewis, nine adults including a 75-year-old grandmother were accused of sexually abusing three children in satanic rituals. In July 2004 the charges were dropped for lack of evidence. The accused are still fighting to clear their names.

How could it happen again? The *Eye* has established that there is still a network of believers across the UK among professionals and assorted therapists who work with children and adult "survivors" who reinforce each other's convictions that what they now term "ritual abuse" exists, through literature, websites, conferences and training courses.

Dundee is a hotbed of activity. It is where Laurie Matthew, who was indecently assaulted by an uncle as a child, runs several organisations for ritual abuse survivors and plays a key role. She is the author of books (including *Where Angels Fear: Ritual Abuse in Scotland*) and a key speaker at conferences on ritual abuse. In Connecticut USA in August 2004 she spoke on "The Fight against Ritual Abuse in Scotland".

Groups run by Matthew, all based at 1 Victoria Road, Dundee, include Ritual Abuse Network Scotland (RANS), which has a website offering "support for survivors" and a resource for counsellors, parents and concerned friends, packed with ghoulish detail about "the reality" of ritual abuse, including allegations of babies being bred for sacrifice and children being sexually abused and mutilated and a checklist of signs and symptoms to look for; Dundee Young Women's Centre, which organised conferences on ritual abuse in Dundee in April 2002 and Edinburgh in August 2003; TRASH, Tayside Ritual Abuse and Abuse Help, a service run by volunteers for survivors of ritual abuse, which ran a "survivors only" day in May 2003; and 18 and Under which ran two "training days" on ritual abuse in February 2005 for professionals working with young survivors.

Matthew is now helping to influence policy-making in Scotland via her presence on the Scottish parliament's cross-party group on Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse, which produced a national strategy for adult survivors in September 2005. Her group 18 and Under is a member of the group.

Last month, celebrating the cross-party group's work, the Scottish Executive launched a new booklet, *A Can of Worms – Working with Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse,* funded by the Scottish Health Department as part of a £2m national strategy to improve services for adult survivors. The booklet is aimed at "healthcare, social work professionals and other frontline workers".

Useful contacts include 18 and Under and TRASH, which it describes as giving "support for people who have experienced ritual abuse."

The booklet was co-written by Dr Sarah Nelson, a member of the all party group and a research fellow in the sociology department at Edinburgh University, who describes her main research activity as "childhood sexual abuse and related issues of child protection". Her publications include chapters in books including *Ritual Abuse: The Challenge for Feminists* and an account of the Orkney case in a forthcoming book *Ritual Abuse in the 21st Century: Clinical, Forensic and Social Implications* to be published by Southern Methodist Press. How long before there is another Satanic Panic?

BBC Monitoring, the Caversham-based service that scrutinizes thousands of foreign radio broadcasts on behalf of the BBC, the Ministry of Defence, British intelligence services and the CIA, has had its funding reviewed by its new master, the Cabinet Office.

Formerly run by the Foreign Office, Caversham provided "open source intelligence" in the war against terror – information that was highly prized for its rawness and lack of Downing Street spin.

Despite howls of protests from desk officers and analysts at the FO and MI6, Caversham's budget has now been cut by £2m, losing 80 posts and ending the monitoring of radio broadcasts from boring places where nothing of interest happens – such as the former Soviet Union and the whole of Africa.

Monitoring's partner, the CIA's Foreign Broadcast Information Service, with an office in Caversham, is also under financial review. The CIA's secrecy requirements make it impossible for it to admit that the FBIS is also facing cuts, but staff at Caversham have told the *Eye* that they are no longer able to have access to FBIS translations because they are no longer being made.

"BRILLIANT new aspiring glamorous drama," is how *Wales on Sunday* columnist Angharad Mair described S4C's *This Life*-style drama series, *Caerdydd*.

What Mair didn't mention was that *Caerdydd* is produced by The Fiction Factory, part of the Tinopolis Group. And who happens to be an executive director of the Tinopolis Group? None other than Angharad Mair…

O·B·N

Television news – I can't watch too much of it! I have Sky on most of the time. To be honest, I have gone off BBC and ITV. I just think that Sky is a lot better. I know the editor Nick Pollard and I told him the other day that we have become Sky freaks.

DAVID SUCHET *(former ITN newscaster now presenting Sky-produced Channel 5 news)*
Press Gazette

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

CAREERS ADVICE
WHEN I GROW UP I WANT TO BE A LOLLIPOP LADY!
THAT'S NICE
YES... LIKE ALL THE OTHER FEMALE CELEBRITIES!
HEADS ON STICKS Weekly

DOING THE ROUNDS

Trust Me, I'm Dr Foster

DR FOSTER is a private company founded in 2000 with the egalitarian aim of collecting accurate information about NHS services, and then selling it.

In December, it was listed as one of the top ten fastest growing British companies, with sales rising from £467,000 to £6.825m between 2001 and 2004. Its cornering of the health information market has been so ruthless that if current trends continue, the whole of the NHS – from the health secretary all the way up to patients – will become wholly reliant on the statistical outpourings of this single private company.

Few argue about the right (and need) for patients, clinicians, managers and politicians to have accurate information about how the NHS is performing. But such is the sensitivity of the data, and the potentially catastrophic consequences of getting it wrong, that any organisation charged with providing it must not just have the relevant expertise but must also be seen as entirely impartial. Alas Dr Foster has expanded its remit from being a provider of information to a marketing advice agency, developing an unacceptably close relationship with the Department of Health.

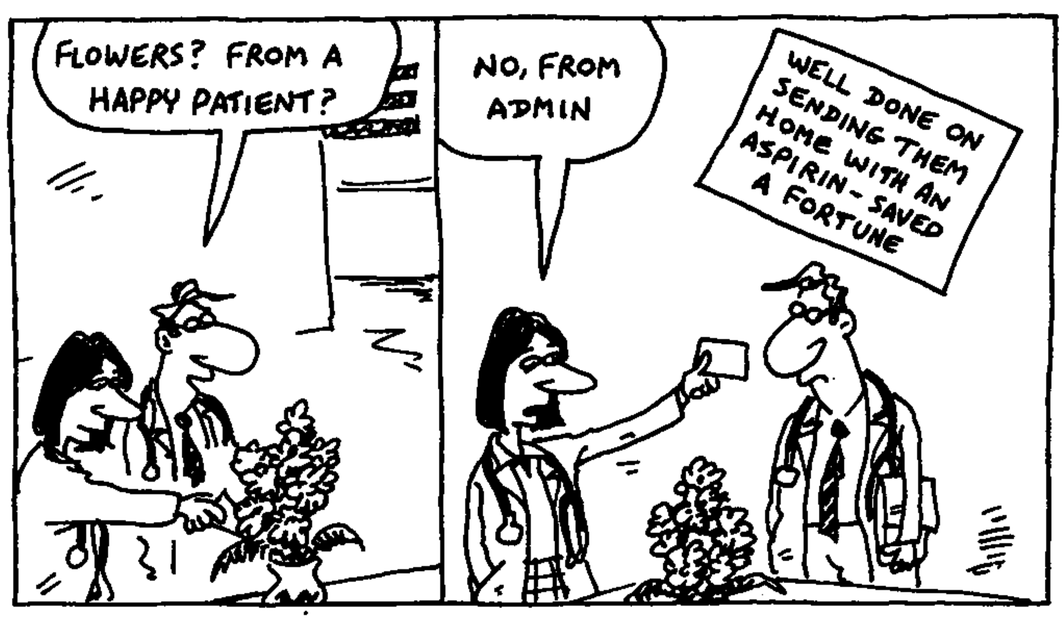
In October, Health Secretary Patsy Hewitt agreed to establish a joint venture between Dr Foster and the Health and Social Care Information Centre, the DoH's statistical arm. As one unhappy DoH source put it: "Statisticians' independence will be compromised as they will become answerable, not to the independent Statistics Commission, but to a for-profit company." Whether this transfer was subject to the competitive procurement process required under EU law is anybody's guess.

The DoH has also taken on Matt Tee as its acting director of communications. Mr Tee just happens to be director of business development at Dr Foster. Given that the information Dr Foster provides is used by "new" Labour and the Department of Health to push through the reform agenda (punishing failing hospitals, awarding foundation status, offering patients a choice of four different hospitals whether they want one or not), this secondment appears totally inappropriate. For Dr Foster to have any credibility at all, it needs to be free of any potential conflict of interest. There must be no perception that the government has spun Dr Foster's information to suit its needs or indeed that Dr Foster has procured contracts thanks to inside information at the DoH.

Many at the DoH are deeply unhappy with Mr Tee's appointment, not least the chief executive Sir Nigel Crisp who is said to have voiced strong opposition but was overridden by Hewitt. "New" Labour health secretaries have a history of being close to their communications directors (Alan Milburn and Sian Jarvis anyone?) but it can hardly be healthy for Hewitt and Crisp to be at loggerheads.

As for the quality of Dr Foster's information, much depends on the expertise of the "Dr Foster Unit" (sic) at Imperial College, London. This is headed by Sir Brian Jarman, whose son Julian is a medical director and researcher for Dr Foster (and Imperial College). On 24 September 2005, Sir Brian was a signatory to a letter in the *Guardian* warning that the NHS was being destroyed by "the creation of a market that welcomes profit-driven corporations and will compel hospitals and health professionals to compete with each other... Even more of the new money allocated to health will be diverted to shareholders and wasted on the huge administrative costs associated with a market" Quite how Sir Brian squares his work for Dr Foster (publisher of *Marketing Healthcare*) with his socialist beliefs is unclear.

M.D.


off your trolley
REEVE & WAY
FLOWERS? FROM A HAPPY PATIENT?
NO, FROM ADMIN
WELL DONE ON SENDING THEM HOME WITH AN ASPIRIN - SAVED A FORTUNE

SIGNAL FAILURES

FirstGroup: How The Gravy Train Works

SOME people were surprised that, despite its poor performance, bus firm FirstGroup was awarded not only the enlarged Greater Western franchise but also Thameslink Great Northern. But might the cosy relationship between FirstGroup and "new" Labour have played a part?

Details of all franchise deals are "commercially sensitive", so the public has to trust that civil servants chose the bidder with the best offer. The Department for Transport (DfT) civil servants who chose WorstGroup for both the latest franchises, disregarding its miserable performance on the Paddington lines (*Eyes passim*), are led by Mike Mitchell, the DfT's director general of railways. Mitchell moved to that post from FirstGroup, just as Nicola Shaw moved from the Strategic Rail Authority to... FirstGroup.

Usually there is a "cooling off" period to reduce conflicts of interest as people move from one side of the fence to the other, but the chronology of the simultaneous Greater Western and Thameslink competitions is a useful guide for anyone who wants to do business with Labour.

Autumn 2004: Detailed franchise specifications are developed by the SRA where Shaw, "managing director, operations", leads on franchise replacement.

Dec 2004: SRA invites initial franchise bids.

Dec-Feb: FirstGroup, where Mitchell is "business development manager", bids for both franchises.

Feb: DfT announces Mitchell has been appointed its rail director-general.

March: FirstGroup announces Shaw will join it from her current SRA position.

April: SRA shortlists FirstGroup for both franchises.

May: Mitchell becomes DfT's rail chief, Shaw joins FirstGroup.

June: SRA invites final franchise bids.

June-Aug: FirstGroup, where Shaw is now "business change director" reporting directly to chief executive Moir Lockhead, decides how best to meet the specifications drawn up when Shaw was at the SRA.

Sept-Dec: With the SRA abolished, assessing the franchise bids falls to Mitchell and his DfT team. Rejecting all other offers, they decide the bids launched by FirstGroup while he was its business development manager are the best.

When the sleaze-ridden Tories let the original franchises, FirstGroup bagged just one small franchise out of 26. Under "new" Labour, which thankfully washed the sleaze from government, FirstGroup has won so many franchises it's about to become Britain's biggest train operator.

PS: Nobody will be more delighted at this outcome of rail privatisation than FirstGroup finance director Dean Finch, who is responsible for all FirstGroup's rail activities including franchise bids. He moved to WorstGroup from accountants KPMG, where he had worked for the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising on privatising the railways!

RED FACES at Transport for London (TfL), whose controversial new year fare rises were imposed on Tube and bus travellers two days before they were due to come into force.

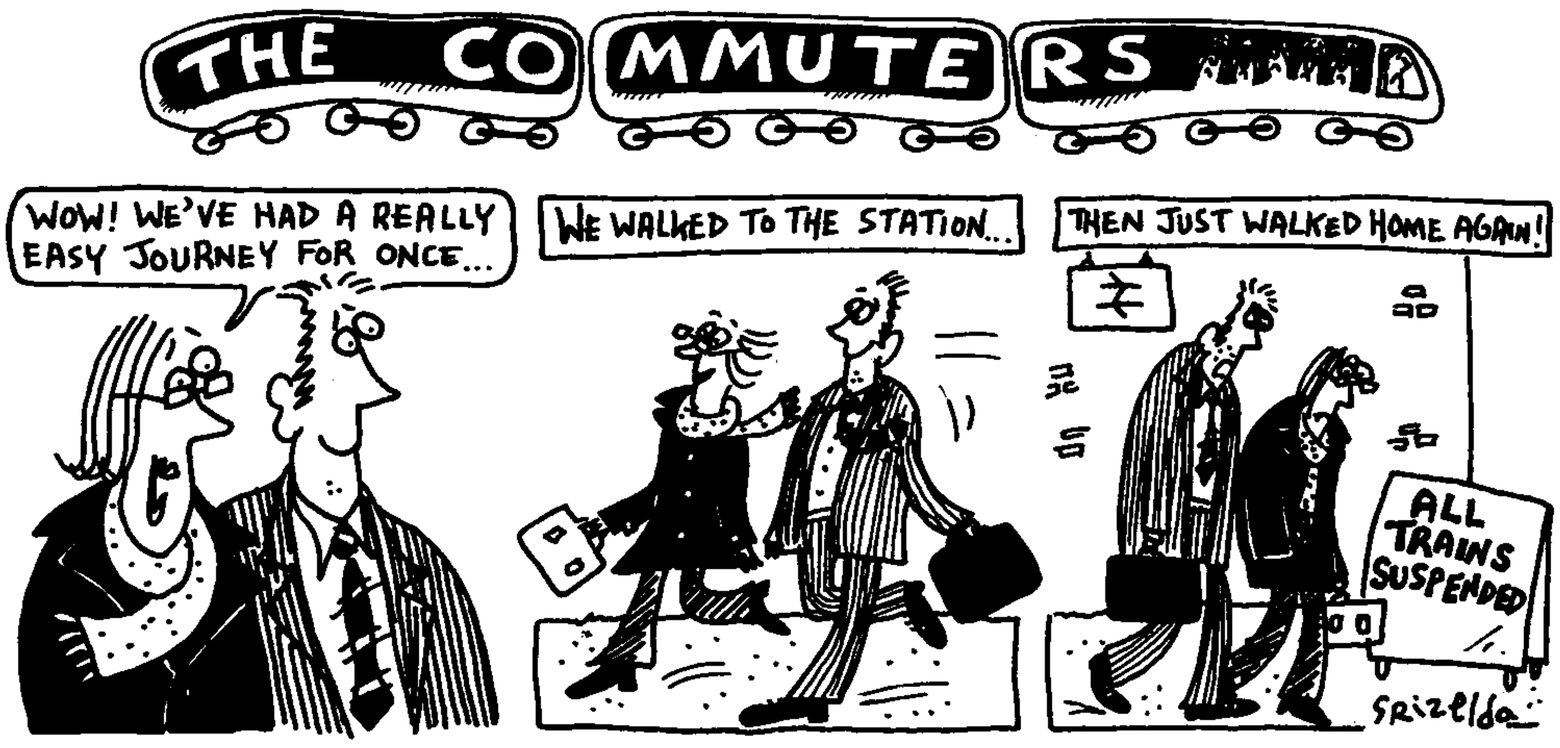
TfL blames this latest cock-up on TranSys Consortium (our old chums EDS and the Cubic Corporation) which runs the Oyster card electronic pre-pay system.

Just before Christmas TfL was forced to take down its "faster, smarter, easier" Oyster card advertisements on the grounds that the cards were none of these. Then, as a gesture of goodwill for the new year, TfL announced a massive hike in Tube fares – £3 instead of £2 for a single journey in the central London zone – to encourage people to stop paying in cash and switch to the Oyster smart card instead. Alas, TranSys downloaded the new price information to more than 2,500 ticket outlets during the night of 29 December instead of the 31st. This cock-up followed the fiasco last January when pre-pay was first introduced and TranSys overcharged passengers by between 20p and 70p, deducting fares for four zones instead of three; and the shutdown of the entire system in March 2005 due to an overload of information on lost and stolen cards.

TfL is furious at the TranSys Consortium and told the *Eye*: "EDS, the member of the consortium responsible for these fare revisions, has demonstrated that it does not have a proper focus on ensuring quality and accuracy. In the new year, TfL will conduct a full scale audit of TranSys's quality control and process management."

Despite TfL's concerns, only those Oyster card holders who spot that they've been ripped off and seek a rebate will be compensated.

'Dr B. Ching'


THE COMMUTERS
WOW! WE'VE HAD A REALLY EASY JOURNEY FOR ONCE...
WE WALKED TO THE STATION...
THEN JUST WALKED HOME AGAIN!
ALL TRAINS SUSPENDED
Grizelda

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

CNUT CASE

THE GAME was up for Scarborough Borough Council's attempts to cover up the truth about its illegal, millions-over-budget sea defences scheme (*Eyes passim*) after *Eye* 1148 revealed details of chief executive John Trebble's cosy early retirement deal with the council – in essence, "I'll go quietly as long as you never publish the report you commissioned into how I fucked up."

Such was the public clamour after stories in the *Eye* and the *Scarborough Evening News* that councillors have now voted to make public the report by consultant Richard Penn after all. Tory council leader Eileen Bosomworth – under whose complacent leadership the scandal was allowed to unfold – is terrifically keen on "drawing a line" under the affair and "moving on". The fact that all but one of the council officers whose failures were identified by Penn over the scheme – in which a firm of consultants was hired without tendering to oversee an unnecessary project which then went millions over budget – have prudently already "moved on" from Scarborough means no further action can be taken against them.

As far back as 1 August 2002, one of the council's lawyers had raised the alarm about "serious breaches of the council's contract procedure". The council's procurement unit, she wrote, "needs to be made aware as a matter of urgency just what a serious problem it is for the council to be placed in a position where it is in breach of its own constitution and acting *ultra vires*". At least four very senior officers were aware of the lawyer's concerns but, incredibly, former chief executive Trebble says no one brought the matter to his attention. Nor is there any record of the council's "cabinet" – the senior elected members who are supposed to be in charge – being informed. Cllr Bosomworth and the other monkeys in the cabinet hope that this is enough to let them off the hook. Voters may wonder, however, if the council's cabinet hasn't a clue what is going on, what on earth it is for?

● **AN unhappy New Year for residents of Barnet, north London, where the Tory council has sliced £200,000 out of the books and media budget and cut the opening hours at East Finchley branch library, which is to shut at lunchtime and lose its late night opening. Elsewhere in Barnet, Totteridge still has no new library after the old one was closed in 2004. After a campaign by residents, the controversial sale of the old library site was made conditional on the developers being asked to include a library in whatever new flats they built. A year later, when no developer was up for the challenge, the council put the land up for sale without conditions. All this in a borough which only a few years ago – before the council changed political hands in 2002 – was awarded beacon status for its use of libraries as a community resource.**

BRAD NEWS

FOR more than a year, no newspaper story about fashionable Canadian architect Frank Gehry's skyscraper designs for the seafront at Hove (*Eyes passim*) has been complete without a mention of the fact that Hollywood actor Brad Pitt has joined the architect's team and will be designing a restaurant, bar or, in some versions, apartments in the hideous complex.

"Pitt on city towers team" – Brighton *Argus*. "Towering ambitions of Brad the builder" – *Sunday Times*. "Brad Troys hand at design" – *Sunday Express*, and so *pun infinitum*. In November 2004, the *Argus* reported that "The... actor is on a year-long internship with Mr Gehry" and "has been spending his spare time working with Mr Gehry on his vision for the controversial seafront complex". Josh Arghiros, managing director of developers Karis, told the paper: "Brad Pitt visits Frank Gehry's studios regularly... When Brad comes in he joins Frank and the team... [he] has expressed a keen and personal interest in following each stage of the King Alfred development project right through to completion."

This news had Skidrow-on-Sea council's deputy leader Sue John swooning. "We believe Frank Gehry is one of the world's greatest architects and we can understand why Brad Pitt would be impressed by him," she told the *Argus*. "We know it is going to be a huge tourist attraction and there would certainly be a great deal of interest knowing he has helped with the project."

Alas, it was all balls. In an interview with the US magazine *Newsweek* in December, Gehry was asked about his new trainee architect. He replied: "We were – I don't know if we are any more – working in Brighton, England, and the guys at Brighton knew I knew Brad Pitt and knew he was interested in architecture. And they asked me if he would like to participate and design the bar, or an apartment or something. So I called him and asked him and he said maybe. And he came by the office and looked at it, and somebody here took a picture of him leaning over the model next to me. I don't know how it got into the press... From that day, I've never heard from him."

Interviewer: "You've never heard from him?"

"Never." [*Laughs*].

"Hadn't he been in your office before that for some period of weeks, sort of apprenticing?"

"Nope."

Oh well, back to the drawing board!

● **MORE news of the man once named "Britain's least consistent councillor" by the *Eye* (issue 1013). David Phillips was elected for Labour in Hackney in 1994 but defected to found the misleadingly-named "Hackney New Labour Group" in 1996. He was therefore expelled by Labour. In 1997 he joined the Conservatives, and was re-elected in 1998. But then he fell out with the Tories and was expelled by them, too. So he sat on the council as an Independent, while joining the Liberal Democrat Party nationally – but not locally. Then he switched to the Green Party. In May this year he is standing in Hackney's Hoxton ward – for the Lib Dems.**

FAILING PULSE

SOUTHWARK council's flagship "Peckham Pulse" swimming pool has been plagued with problems since it opened in 1998. It cost £11m to build, twice the original estimate. The latest difficulty is rather fundamental: the pool's water mysteriously drains away into the sarf London clay. Since March last year, when the problem was discovered, estimates of how much repairs will cost have soared from £1m to £2.5m. Shortly before Christmas, councillors agreed to raid town hall coffers to find the additional repair money, rather than face the prospect of the pool staying permanently closed. Even if all goes well it is unlikely to reopen before the autumn.

The council has engaged an "external legal specialist" to examine whether the council has a case for recovering the cost of the repair work from either the engineers (Anthony Hunt Associates) or the building company (Mowlem – of Bath Spa fame) or both. But if the case ends up in court, the only beneficiaries are likely to be, as ever, m'learned friends.

One possibility is that the finger of blame may be pointed at the architects. This would be interesting, because Peckham Pulse was designed by the council's own in-house Southwark Building Design Services team. Even Southwark council is probably not daft enough to sue itself.

● **FOOTPATHS campaigner Derek Hanlin has unearthed a fascinating fact about the priority attached to maintaining rights of way by Rhondda Cynon Taf, the second biggest council in Wales. In the course of his campaign for the opening of a public right of way at Gilfach Goch, near Pontypridd, Mr Hanlin discovered that RCT council has dealt with just five claims over rights of way in the past 10 years – but has another 65 outstanding. "By my reckoning this means it will take 130 years to clear the backlog," he tells the *Pontypridd Observer*. "Maybe they think global warming or bird flu will save them the bother of dealing with it."**

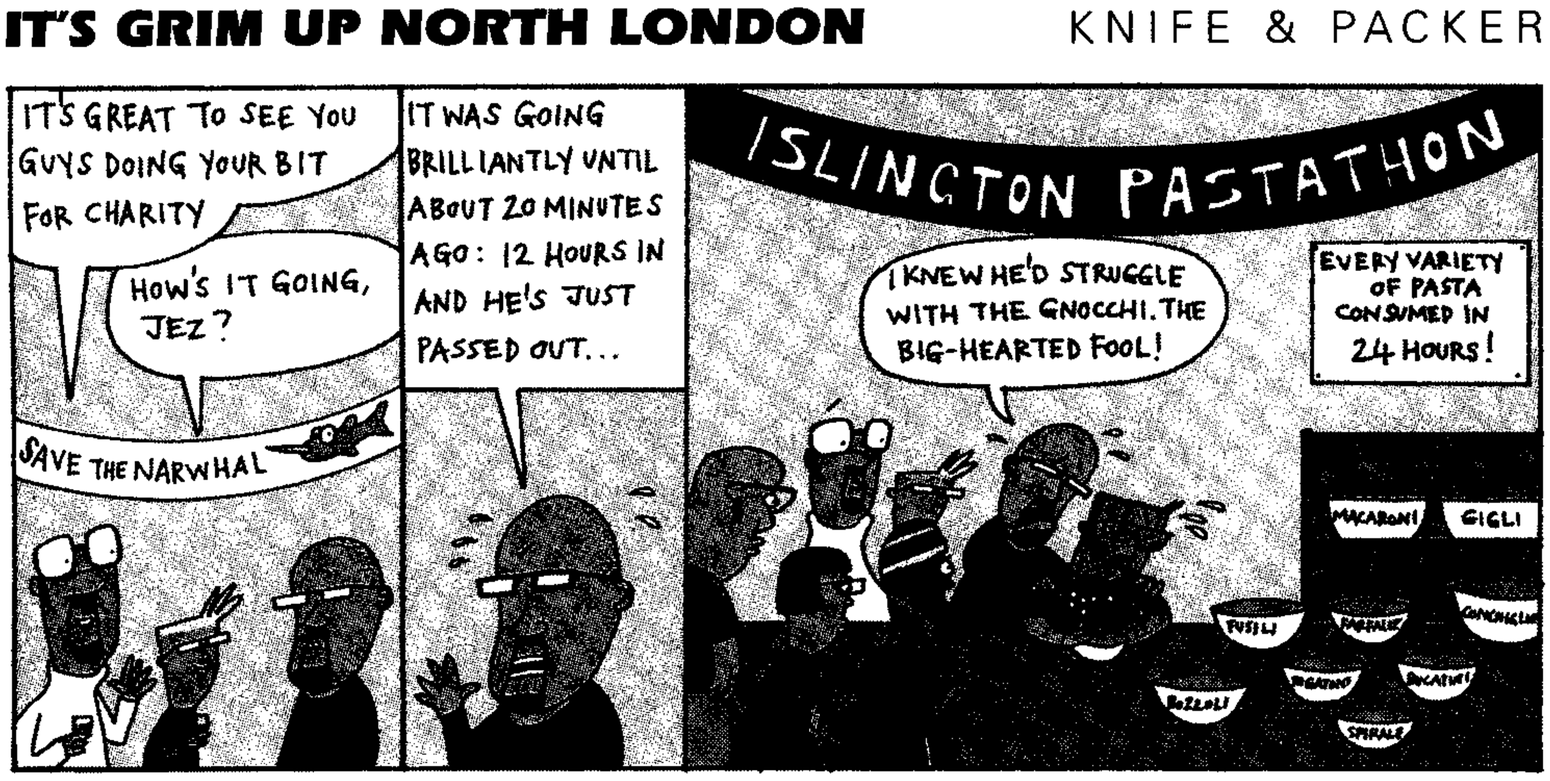
EDUCASHUN NEWZ

THE government's ambitious "Building Schools for the Future" (BSF) plans to refurbish or rebuild all secondary schools over the next 10 to 15 years, largely under the private finance initiative, are already looking shaky if recent attempts by builder Mowlem are anything to go by.

Devon County Council decided to rebuild all five secondary schools in Exeter in one go under a PFI deal with Mowlem, a bulk-buying method that boosts PFI companies' profits but often over-stretches their capabilities and leaves children without new classrooms. And so it proved: last month *Construction News* reported that all five would be delayed. Work on one, the new West Exe College which was due to open in November, has been suspended altogether and according to its headmaster won't be available until next September. Two other colleges due to open last week also failed to do so.

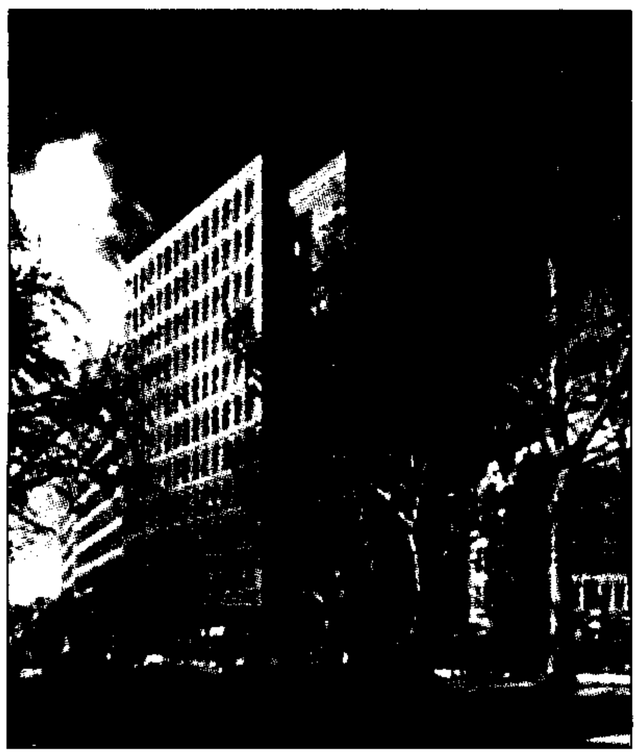
The disruption is particularly serious as, in Mowlem's own words, "the timing of the build is extremely important to Devon County Council as they are changing the approach to the delivery of education by removing all middle schools". And one of the schools has just been placed in special measures partly because its new buildings aren't ready.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON — KNIFE & PACKER


IT'S GREAT TO SEE YOU GUYS DOING YOUR BIT FOR CHARITY
HOW'S IT GOING, JEZ?
SAVE THE NARWHAL
IT WAS GOING BRILLIANTLY UNTIL ABOUT 20 MINUTES AGO: 12 HOURS IN AND HE'S JUST PASSED OUT...
ISLINGTON PASTATHON
I KNEW HE'D STRUGGLE WITH THE GNOCCHI. THE BIG-HEARTED FOOL!
EVERY VARIETY OF PASTA CONSUMED IN 24 HOURS!
MACARONI
GIGLI
FUSILLI
SPIRALE

NOOKS and CORNERS

OF ALL the ancient churches in central London, St Giles-in-the-Fields has the least worthy setting. Designed by Henry Flitcroft in 1731 on the model of Gibbs' St Martin-in-the-Fields, it is a handsome Georgian building with a lovely interior. A medieval church once stood on the site in the heart of one of London's old villages (and most notorious slums). But today St Giles High Street is merely an artery for traffic; and the church is in an arid desert of commercial buildings, the most prominent of which is Colonel Seifert's Centre Point (which should never have been built so close to Flitcroft's innocent masterpiece).



A few years ago the St Giles Renaissance Forum was founded to try to undo some of the damage and bring life back to the area. Centre Point won't go (nor should it: it is now a listed building) but an opportunity has arisen with the proposal to redevelop St Giles Court on the north side of the High Street, almost opposite the church.

The present buildings there are cheap commercial blocks of the early 1950s and of no merit. Unfortunately their proposed replacement is likely to be even more disrespectful to St Giles-in-the-Fields. A planning application will be considered by Camden council this month for a mixture of residential and commercial buildings which will more than double the floor area of the existing blocks and be much higher.

The developers are Legal & General, working with our old friends Stanhope plc (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*). Because the proposal is controversial in terms of height and density, they have resorted to the fashionable ploy of hiring a superstar architect to wow Camden's planning committee who has the added cachet of being *foreign*: Renzo Piano, a cool Italian who hopes to leave his mark on London with his so-called Shard of Glass next to London Bridge Station: a gratuitous 1004ft-high tower for which, alas, Southwark has granted planning permission.

Piano, who was Milord Rogers' partner in designing the Pompidou Centre in Paris, certainly has his moments, but he has never shown any understanding of the nature and character of London, nor any evidence of the subtlety and restraint required in combining shops, flats and offices in an historic area.

His proposal for St Giles Court envisages tall buildings arranged around a central courtyard, covered with a glazed roof. To the north there is to be a 14-storey residential block and to the south – facing St Giles – an 11-storey block of offices. The facades are to be partly glazed and partly faced in multi-coloured ceramic – mostly a reddish-orange colour. This will not make them a particularly sympathetic neighbour to the church, but the main objection to the proposal must be its offensive height and bulk.

In some ways the development is an improvement on the existing buildings (it could scarcely be worse) and there are to be shops, cafés and restaurants on the ground floor as well as affordable housing. But the rector of St Giles is surely right that it will be "detrimental to the setting of St Giles Church, especially from the Churchyard to the south of the church, and will affect both the setting of the listed building and rob amenity from the only local green space".

The proposals make no reference to nearby listed buildings or conservation areas, and while the London Plan recommends a maximum plot ration of 1:5, the new St Giles Court will be an overdevelopment of the site at 1:7. Perhaps if the developers were not so greedy, something better could be achieved. Camden should send Sr Piano back to his drawing board (or computer).

WITH its Heritage Lottery Fund application to be determined later this month, the Chiswick House Park and Gardens Trust seems in a state of panic because of continuing criticism (see Eye 1145).

Chairman Rupert Hambro failed to persuade the Georgian Group to cease its opposition to the current proposals for the gardens of Lord Burlington's exquisite villa. And now another Chiswick trustee, Marcus Binney – architectural correspondent of the Times and chairman of SAVE Britain's Heritage – has followed John Harris in resigning. Disconcerted, the remaining trustees have been putting it about that Binney supports the scheme but resigned because his relationship with the Georgian Group was becoming difficult. Nonsense: he resigned because he could not support the project.

The Chiswick Trust insists its proposal is the only way forward and that, if the Heritage Lottery fails to support it, the villa and gardens will go to rack and ruin. Of course we all want the gardens with their temples and lake to be properly restored – but not with one of the old walled gardens being made into a car park, nor with a big semi-permanent (ie permanent) marquee for corporate junkets near the villa.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

I still can't understand his strange compulsion...
PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG GIRL
GRAYSON PERRY
...to make pots.
Weird!
AIT OF THE AS A YOUNG
Must be psychological.

WEST YORKSHIRE POLICE

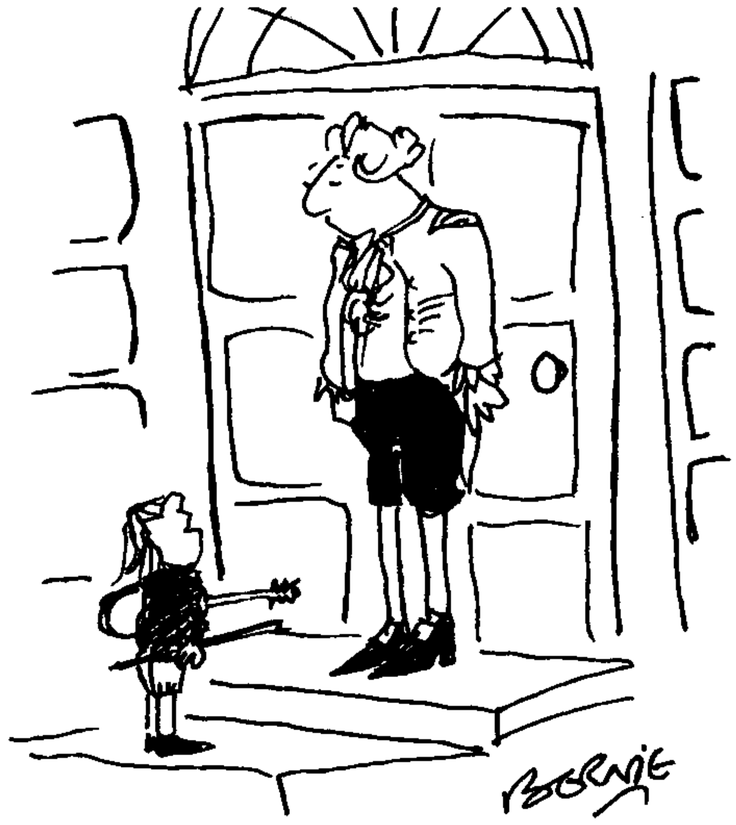
We do not sell eggs to persons under 16 unless accompanied by an adult.

I-SPY

Notice at Kwik Save supermarket, Ilkley, W. Yorks.

Submitted by Ivor Hughes.

£10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*



"Can Wolfgang come out to play?"

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THERE's little enough opera in Ireland as it is – no full-time opera house or full-time company in either capital – so many aficionados are extra gloomy over proposed changes to the beloved Wexford Festival.

Every autumn the tiny backstreet Theatre Royal turns into something like Bayreuth and Glyndebourne knocked together with a dash of Guinness. It's an exclusive black-tie and tiara job, but the Dublin glitterati are worried. The Theatre Royal is being pulled down this month, to be replaced by something far bigger and better – and far more available to your average punter.

In fact Wexford is doing as Glyndebourne did: going for outreach rather than exclusivity, and the kind of international profile you can't have when you're effectively a members' club. The club members, though, like things the way they are, and are angry that the festival is getting too ambitious for its own good. They're not interested in international profile and already feel Wexford is losing its Irishness (not least, by the engagement during recent years of pit-bands from Belarus and Poland rather than using local players from the RTE Orchestra in Dublin).

They're also mightily aggrieved that the festival isn't going to happen for the next two years while the building work goes on. This autumn only offers a cut-down event in a makeshift venue, and 2007 will be outdoors, with the dates shifted from autumn to summer.

The festival chairman is talking up the project as a "watershed" for Irish opera. But what worries the tiara set is his promise that "we [will] continue to offer a unique but different Wexford experience" for the coming years. As they say, "different" and "continue" don't quite fit together. Expect stormy times.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Wasting police time

Sir,

Police officers reading about North Yorkshire County Council's claim of "harassment" when asked simple questions by journalists (Eye 1149) will barely raise their eyebrows. The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 (amended by SOCPA 2005) was introduced mainly to deal with "stalking" after several high profile cases. Regrettably, loose wording allowed all manner of interpretation and it is now often used by jilted, bitter ex-partners seeking to criminalise, for their own purposes, what is generally nothing more than nuisance (texting, telephone calls etc), neighbours with petty disputes who seem unable to resolve their problems like grown-ups and teenage girls falling out with each other on a daily basis, using "texting" (again) to annoy each other. Such individuals readily and regularly report such "crimes" to the police who, in a desperate attempt to comply with the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) then record and "investigate" such nonsense. The female journalist who called NYCC does have a defence to the "offence" though. The Act states that it is only harassment if "another reasonable person in possession of the same information would think the course of conduct amounted to harassment" I think NYCC might struggle there.

Get out there and deal with burglars and rapists? If only.

MARK POWLES (serving officer),

Ringmer, E. Sussex.

Lookalike

Alton

Hill

Sir,

The editor of the Observer newspaper, Roger Alton, appears to bear an uncanny resemblance to the outsize-collar-wearing comedian Harry Hill. Are they related?

Yours faithfully,
ENA B. BERLINER,

Oxford.

Hogwarts hogwash

Sir,

Your reviewer of Anne Rice (1148) refers to "freedom loving states of America where... Harry Potter had been banned... as a pagan text". No state in the US has done any such thing. As in Canada and Britain, a small number of local school boards or headmasters have banned one or another of the books from classroom use. In virtually all cases, these bans have been overturned, usually to the sound of general derision.

Regards,
ARTHUR LINDLEY,

Singapore.

Rap on the knuckles

Sir,

Dan Barrow's statement (Letters, 1148) that he'd rather keep his ethnically diverse students "engaged with something culturally relevant to them than repeat dry and pointless grounding in classical music" is pure inverse snobbery. Is an English teacher going to give up teaching students how to read and write because students prefer to watch television? Schools are there to give tools to young people, and while an education in world music is an excellent thing, no adult who has been given a schoolroom grounding in "classical" music is going to say that it deprived them of anything. However, someone who didn't learn to read and write music will have a far more difficult time acquiring these skills later on. What ethnicity or income has to do with literacy, musical or otherwise, is beyond me.

PATRICIA HAMMOND,

London N4.

Saville row

Sir,

Re: Inquiries. For those interested, as a result of much of the British media's obsession with the cost of the Bloody Sunday inquiry, the government was able last April to bring in the Inquiries Act. The Rosemary Nelson and other inquiries in Northern Ireland will be conducted under this legislation which means that the requisite minister has control of the terms of reference, the personnel who sit on the inquiry and the purse strings. If cost is getting out of hand, the minister can stop the inquiry. Ministers also decide what will be published. So effectively there cannot be a public inquiry of the type established under Lord Saville anymore. For those concerned about human rights and the way the police and security services abused their powers in a number of cases in Northern Ireland and beyond, this is a matter of great concern. However, if – as appears to be the case with your correspondent – cost is the only concern, then rest assured under the Inquiries Act there will be no more Saville-style inquiries or any other worth the title in the future.

PAUL DONOVAN,

London E11.

Not The Nine O'clock News

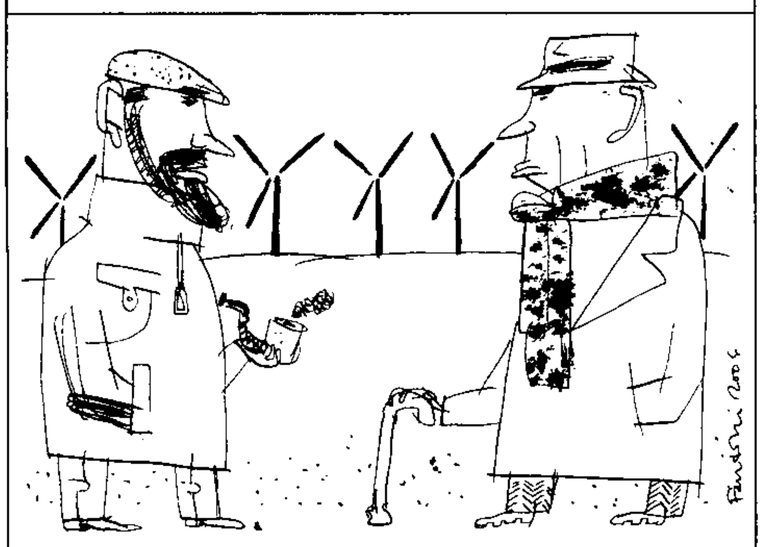
Sir,

Unfortunately your Media News in the last edition was inaccurate in almost every respect. News 24 isn't "short of hacks" – as you put it – at all. It is fully staffed. And as far as your comments about the "Six and Nine" being overstaffed and directors working three days a week on full salary – also wrong in every respect. They aren't overstaffed. The directors mainly work four 12-hour days a week. And the Nine isn't the Nine – it has been the Ten for many years. Keep watching.

Best wishes,
KEVIN BAKHURST,

Controller, BBC News 24.

Scenes You Seldom See



"I really like wind farms – they break up the horizon"

Medal fatigue

Sir,

Sorry Square Basher (1149): I had no idea that triangular sausages still existed, probably left over from our days in India. However, do not expect an early delivery of medals. There are 6,001 former inmates still waiting for theirs from 1939-45 war.

A letter to my MP (27 Sept 05) from Don Touhig MP, who is the minister responsible for veterans not getting their medals very quickly, said: "Retrieving records from the archives is a time consuming and exacting process." So soldier on, and eat your sausage.

JIM CASHMORE,

Sgt Rtd, 1st Battalion The South Staffordshire Regiment.

Holy wrong

Sir,

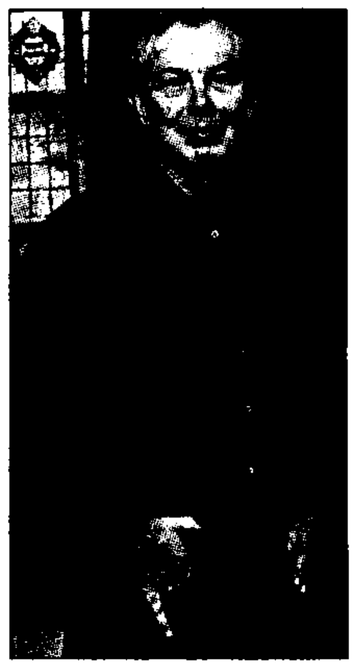
In describing a recent programme "showing how the central tenets of Christianity could have been based on a misunderstanding of events", your TV critic "Remote Controller" (1149) claimed "You either believe that the Angel Gabriel supernaturally impregnated the Virgin Mary, or you don't". I don't – I always thought that the chap responsible was God, with Gabriel merely announcing it – hence all those Annunciation paintings. Don't blame the messenger.

Yours,
ANGELICA VOX,

London SW18.

Lookalike

Blair



Hurley

Sir,

We spotted Liz Hurley and Tony Blair in yesterday's new-look Observer, and wondered if you could make anything of their relationship – if, as seems, they might be related.

All the best for 2006,
SUE WAKELY & DON BAILLIE,

Bristol.

Letters They Didn't Print

An occasional series

To the Editor, the *Times*

Sir – Whilst I appreciate that you have to 'give the punters what they want' in your battle with the Daily Hellograph and others (ie large colour pictures of attractive young women filling one third of the front page), do you have to find such tragic subjects to feature?

Since the start of the New Year, half your issues have featured a murdered female backpacker, a female lawyer committing suicide and women with gambling problems which, naturally, warranted an attractive blonde. Only the demise of Charles Kennedy and the death of US miners pushed such images off the front page. Yesterday's feature and headline, 'Holiday Snaps of Girl Who Never Returned', were the final straw and would disgrace *The Sport* let alone an ex-broadsheet. What must her family and friends think of such tawdry exploitation? If you have to find such images for the front, why not use a tart from *Celebrity Big Brother* who actually wants such publicity?

Yours,
Richard Parker.

Lookalike

McFadden

Tarrant

Sir,

I am sure your readers will have noticed the remarkable resemblance between submarine captain Robert Tarrant, recently court-martialled at Plymouth for "berating his subordinates with such rage that his face became gorged with blood", and actor Steve McFadden, noted for his performances as the equally red-faced and unpleasant Phil Mitchell in EastEnders.

Can they be related?

ENA B. MANNORAK,

London.

George bushed

Sir,

Hillary Clinton, if she runs, is unlikely to be challenging a George Bush in 2008 (Street of Shame, 1149). The 22nd amendment to the US Constitution bars Dubya from more than two terms as President. Mind you, your correspondent did not specify which George – is Dad going to have another go? I think we should be told.

Keep up the good work.

RICHARD BEE,

Via email.

Oh, bollocks

Sir,

Re: the Christmas Non-Book Round-Up

I'm sorry to say that your predictions for a book with "Bollocks" in the title as being "new for 2006" are somewhat behind the times – Penguin/Michael Joseph published "Bollocks To Alton Towers: Uncommonly British Days Out" in April last year. And very good it is too.

Yours faithfully,
E.V. MORGAN,

Via email.

SOLUTIONS

"Russ Andrews: Solutions for Better Music & Movies" – *cables*

"Red Funnel Distribution – the Isle of Wight Solution" – *ferry freight*

"AWD Consulting: Realising Potential Through Effective People Solutions" – *personnel*

"IdeaS Language Solutions: Translations, Interpreting, Training, Suggestopedia" – *translator*

"Zurich Home Solutions" – *Insurance*

"02 Blue wireless headset: Neck strap clips securely to your headset providing a flexible carry solution" – *a strap*

All submitted by readers

Tide of drivel

Sir,

Forget SOLUTIONS – we have had enough of that and there are plenty of worse words. How about this new horrible new usage of CASCADE from British Airways: "Please cascade this information to your consultants. I have attached a template for your convenience."

Regards,
NICK HART,

Via email.

"And what did you learn today?"

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"I've just turned 36. The likelihood is in four years' time I'll be 40."
SHANE WARNE, Radio 5 Live
(Rupert Price)

"... all of this left the referee costing us more than what we should have got."
SAM ALLARDYCE, Radio 5 Live
(Keith Barrett)

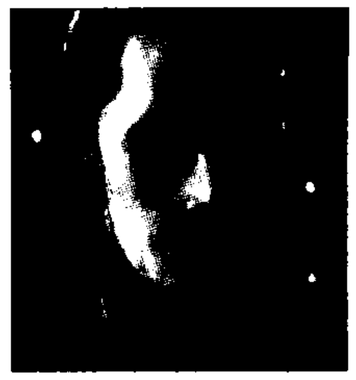
"It was like they had lost a limb because he [Eric Cantona] was the backbone of that side."
EDITH BOWMAN, BBC2
(Freddy Gray)

"Caravalho is leaning over himself..."
PHIL PARRY, Radio London
(Terry Loscombe)

"I'll be surprised, I'll put it no stronger than that... I'll be very surprised indeed."
CHARLES KENNEDY, Radio 4
(Michael White)

Lookalike

Wrath



Burns

Sir,

I was struck by the similarity between Mr Peter Burns (self-confessed diva) and the Wrath from Stargate Atlantis (self-confessed planet ravager). Are they perhaps related?

Yours,
HENRY SPENCE,

Via email.

Genetic engineering

Sir,

Your inclusion of Duke McKenzie's comments in Colemanballs (1148) seems rather silly.

Clearly what McKenzie is saying is that one fighter appears to be naturally bigger and stronger than the other. The term "genetics" is commonly used with this meaning in the context of athletic strength training. The quotation does not seem in keeping with the usual nonsense which you rightly poke fun at.

Mr Mckenzie's unpretentious, no-nonsense and highly informative style of commentary is very refreshing and sets an excellent example which other sports commentators would do well to emulate.

RUSTAM STOLKIN,

Via email.

Mull it over

Sir,

Further to Raj Kothari's letter (1148) on the hymn "Morning has Broken": the words may be due to Eleanor Farjeon, but the tune is called "Bunessan" and was composed by a woman in the village of that name, here in the Isle of Mull, Scotland.

Regards,
GEORGE SASSOON,

Lochbuie, Isle of Mull.

Monumental blunder

Sir,

The new monumental sculpture in Whitehall is worse than Piloti allows (1149). The big otiose caption "The Women of World War II" is on both of its long sides. As a consequence, every time I pass the brutish thing, its imaginary subtitle expands: "(except Eva Braun, obviously, or Clara Pettacci, or Diana Mosley, or Tokyo Rose, or Irma Grese or Magda Goebbels...)".

BERNARD McGINLEY,

Hastings, East Sussex.

"Hope I get old before I die"

Letter from **Baku**

from Our Own Correspondent

THE script was perfect: after rigged parliamentary elections the people of Azerbaijan would flood the streets in fury and sweep away a regime that had become a byword for corruption and hypocrisy. On the outskirts of Baku, a group of executives from Britain's most friendly oil firm, BP, would emerge blearily from HQ and pledge BP's allegiance to the new government.

Alas, it didn't quite turn out that way. True, elections were rigged, with the usual ballot-stuffing, voter intimidation and mysterious power-cuts at polling stations. Hence the easy victory for the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan, headed by President Ilham Aliev. Few Azeris expected anything else, but our friends the Americans had higher hopes after persuading Ilham to allow voters to dip their fingers in indelible ink, so they couldn't vote more than once.

The popular uprising some people predicted didn't happen. There was the odd protest, but we are used to doing what we are told. There was at least a united opposition this time, but really we need someone young and dynamic to lead us out of bondage.

This role is coveted by Ali Karimli, the 40-year-old head of the Popular Front Party; but his appeal is largely in Baku. Cutting a rather lonely figure is Isa Gambar, avuncular head of the Musavat party, created in 1911 during Baku's first oil boom but recently forced to relocate to a run-down office on the fringes of the capital. Last but not least is Rasul Guliev, the former speaker of parliament whose decision to charter a plane to Baku just a fortnight before the elections sparked a bizarre chain of events that are still mired in confusion.

Rasul, who left Baku in 1996 after crossing swords with the late president, Ilham's father Heidar Aliev, never reached his final destination. As dozens of toughs encircled Baku airport waiting to whisk him off to the nearest interrogation chamber, he had his plane diverted to Ukraine where he was promptly arrested for three days on an Interpol warrant. Just days afterwards, at least half a dozen Azeri ministers and state officials were arrested on suspicion of conniving with Rasul to overthrow the government.

The word on the street is that one of the accused, Economy Minister Farhad Aliev, had lost out in a turf war with Kamaladdin Heydarov, head of the state customs committee, who has amassed huge wealth from controlling most of our imports. We're now waiting for the accused to repent their sins in front of the TV cameras and volunteer for hard labour.

Amid all the intrigue is the forlorn figure of Ilham, a bon vivant with a weakness for casinos who runs the country much as a rabbit caught in the headlights might. He gets his advice from a kitchen cabinet that includes his chief of staff, Ramiz Mehtiev, his missus Mehriban and the billionaire Heydarov. Ilham lives in the shadow of his old man, Heidar, a cunning fox who rose through the ranks of the KGB to become number three in the Politburo and, in the early 1990s, president of independent Azerbaijan. But his spirit lives on at hundreds of public places in Baku named after him, including airports, oil tankers, public squares and corner shops.

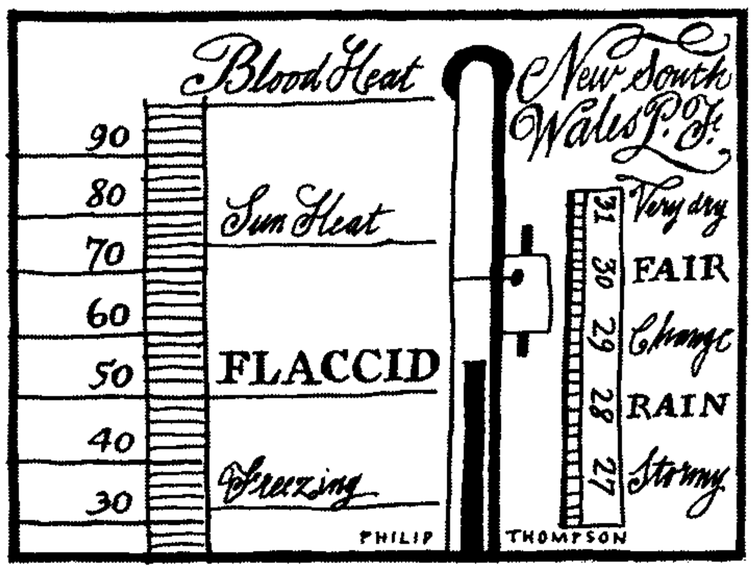
Heidar Aliev is also alive and well even in Turkey, where a new oil terminal at Ceyhan on the Med has been named after him. The terminal is connected to Baku via a 1,700km pipeline that runs across Georgia and is now filling up with oil produced by BP and its partners. If there's one Brit we have to thank for BP's success, it's Margaret Thatcher. In 1992 she was wheeled out to Baku by BP to hand two hefty signature bonuses to the Azeri government. God bless you Ma'am.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "It was physically impossible for me to have exposed myself to Karen Parkes," Bradley George Hosemans told the Appeals Panel of the Industrial Relations Commission in Bathurst, "because my penis isn't long enough. While giving evidence, Ms Parkes claimed to have seen me 'holding my penis in my hand and flopping it about' while I was supervising a tournament at the golf course last year. But I have submitted measurements to this tribunal which clearly show that my hand is wider than the length of my penis, and she therefore cannot have seen it, because it's tiny. Ask anyone who's laughed at me in the swimming pool showers."

However, Justice Roger Boland upheld the original ruling against the former Detective Sergeant, which had resulted in his dismissal from the New South Wales police force. "Mr Hosemans has argued that Ms Parkes cannot have seen him 'holding



his penis in one hand and flopping it about' but I do not accept his submission. It is quite possible for Mr Hosemans to have held his flaccid penis in his clenched fist, with the penis stretched to the extent that it was visible in the manner claimed by Ms Parkes. Indeed, I can conceive of many different ways in which he might have positioned his hand vis-a-vis his penis so that it could be seen, nor is any allowance made for the effects of the weather, which could invalidate the accuracy of his measurements. The appeal against his dismissal is therefore rejected." *(Sydney Morning Herald, 15/11/05. Spotter: Alan Dean)*

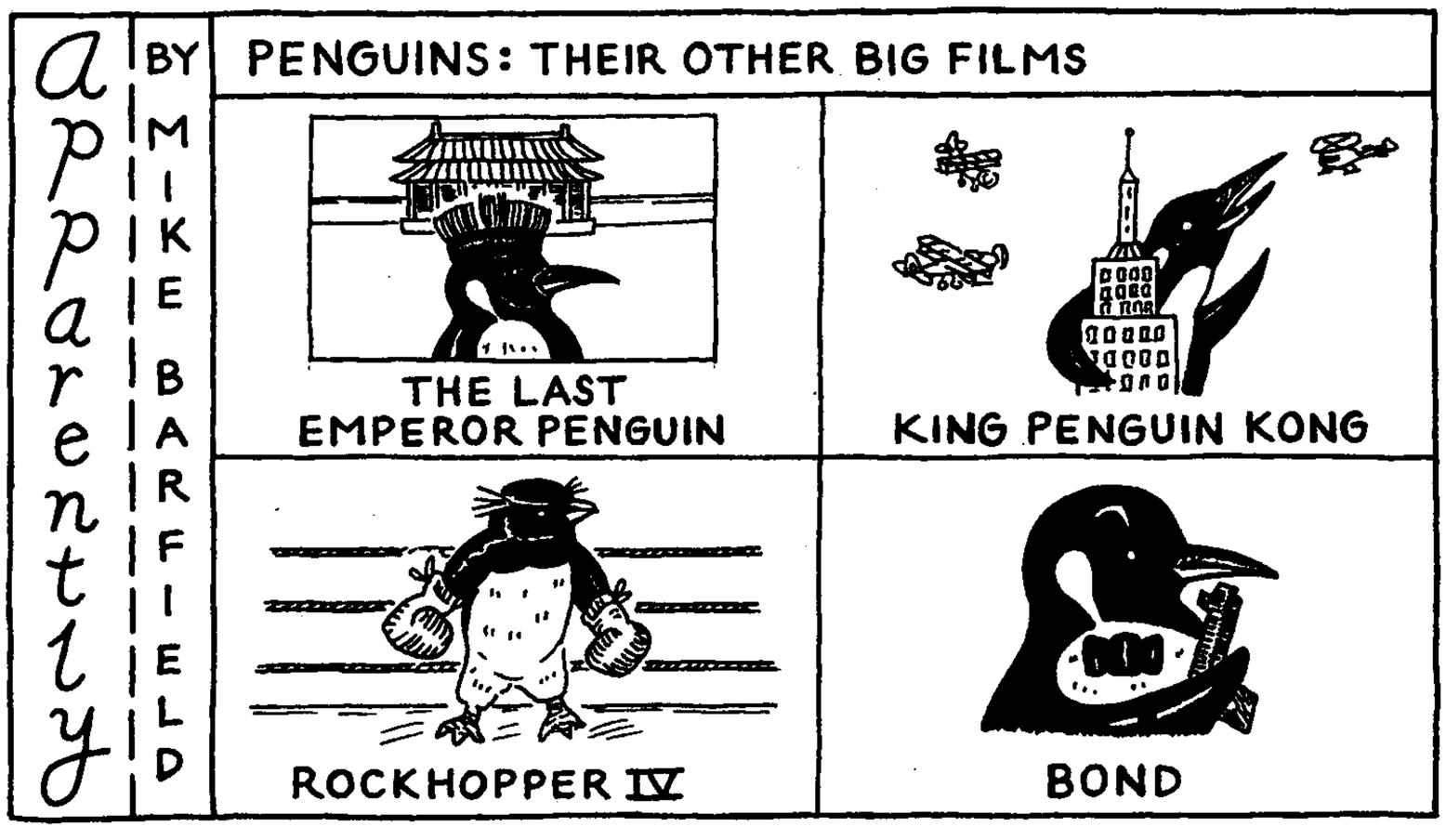
– ● –

● *"We banned grumpiness a year ago, to promote a more congenial atmosphere in the workplace," Thomas Kuwatsch of the IT company Nuzwerk told reporters in Leipzig. "At first, we simply had an informal company philosophy of compulsory smiling, but one female employee refused to subscribe to it, and moaned so much that other employees complained about her complaining. So we made the ban on grumpiness official by introducing a clause into contracts, stipulating that all employees must arrive at work in a very good mood, and stay that way all day, with grumpiness being a sackable offence. Once it became part of the contract, our employees understood that they had no option but to be happy, and really started to think positively. Mood is an important factor in productivity, and everyone here now smiles and works hard. We ordered them to be happy, and now they are."* (The Australian, 7/11/05. Spotter: Anon)

– ● –

● "For years we've been warning tourists not to accept food or drink from people they don't know," Police Lt. Col. Akachai Chaicharoen told a press conference in Bangkok, "because from time to time, foreigners have been drugged and robbed by friendly strangers. But now we must add one more warning for tourists. Don't rush to kiss a stranger on the mouth, especially a ladyboy prostitute. Otherwise you may end up losing not only your pride, but your wallet too."

Lt. Col. Chaicharoen was speaking after the arrest of three transvestite hookers, who confessed to stealing $7,300 from a Bangladeshi businessman they had drugged. "The leader of the transvestite gang had concealed a strong sedative pill under his tongue, and spat it down the victim's throat while kissing him in his hotel room. The businessman soon felt dizzy and passed out, then woke up ten hours later naked to find that his cash, watch, mobile phone, notebook computer, and all his clothes had disappeared. In the past, we have heard of transvestite gangs who smeared their nipples with tranquillizers in order to drug men, but this is the first time anyone has admitted to administering a sedative during a kiss. So tourists should beware of the charms of our ladyboys, if they do not wish to end up in a deep sleep." *(Daily Times [Pakistan), 16/11/05. Spotter: Steve Cleary)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

And what a great start to the New Year we are having, with the launch of my new 'Respect' campaign!

I am sure everyone of you will now be familiar with what I am hoping to achieve for the parish with this 'Respect Action Plan'!

And yes, kids, have you noticed what that spells out? Yes, R-A-P!! Or 'Rap'!

You can't get much more modern, young and with-it than that, can you?

If there is one thing which everyone in this parish must be agreed on, it's that we're all just sick and tired of the 'yob culture' – young people who spend their time littering the streets, swigging lager, defacing public buildings, urinating in the bus shelter, spitting at old ladies and listening to violent and mindless 'rap' music on their ipods!

Well, I'm not just going to talk about 'Respect'! I'm going to do something about it, and that's why I've come up with an 84-page 'Action Plan' (available on the vicarage website, www.respectthevicar.com) that we can all think about and discuss over the next few months.

In it I spell out a few of my ideas of how we can try to recover some of those old values that our society used to have – not that in any way I want us to go back to some 'mythical golden age' where people went round showing respect to one another and helping old ladies across the road without spitting at them!

No, as you remember, our St Albion's motto is 'Forwards not backwards'! So instead of constantly harking back to the past, let's move forwards shall we, to a new golden age, where people go round helping old ladies across the road, like they used to do in the old days!

"But vicar," I can hear our friend in Tesco's saying to me, as he queues up at the '10 Items Or Less' checkout with his pathetic wire-basket full of 'Meals For

One For The Price Of Two', "haven't we heard all this before? Didn't you preach about the need for 'Respect' back in 1997, and then again in 1998 and 1999 and every year since?"

Well, yes, actually, and I don't mind admitting that I did! And you know why? Because it was important then, and it's important now!

So let's have a little more 'respect', particularly from embittered malcontents in Tesco's who seem to have nothing better to do with their sad and empty lives but try and find new excuses for criticising your vicar!

Which brings me neatly to my fourth and final point, which is about annoying neighbours who try to make life difficult for decent, ordinary, hard-working folk!

Why should we put up with neighbours like these, with their squealing babies, their temper tantrums and the constant noise of their computers, bleeping away day and night, because they can't get the parish accounts to add up properly!

The last straw comes when these neighbours start hanging out dirty great union flags from the bedroom and start singing "Rule Britannia" at all hours of the day and night!!

Under my new proposals, such 'neighbours from hell' will be evicted and sent back to Scotland where they belong!

It may sound harsh, but sometimes, as it says in the good book, "You have to be cruel to be kind." (*Book of Asbos*, 15. 17).

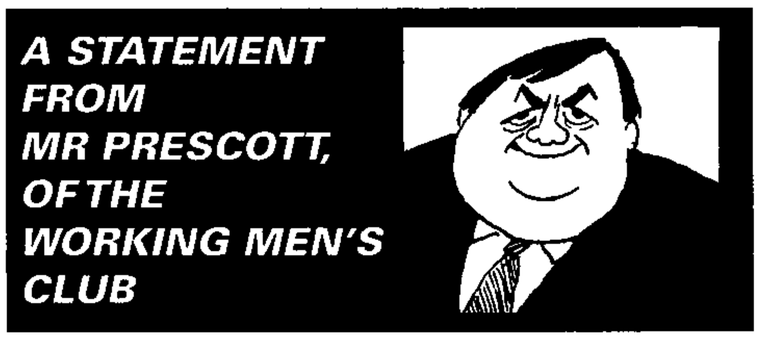
Think about it!

Yours 'respectfully',

Tony

IDENTI-TEA CRISIS!

May I just remind parishioners that the young man in this photograph is NOT, repeat NOT the Vicar! It is sad to see a promising young man suffering from serious delusions such as thinking that merely by drinking tea he can be a vicar! Look, *I* was the first person to drink tea round here and it is rather pathetic to see other people trying to steal my tea idea – what you might call jumping on the tea-wagon!! Tea.B. (!)

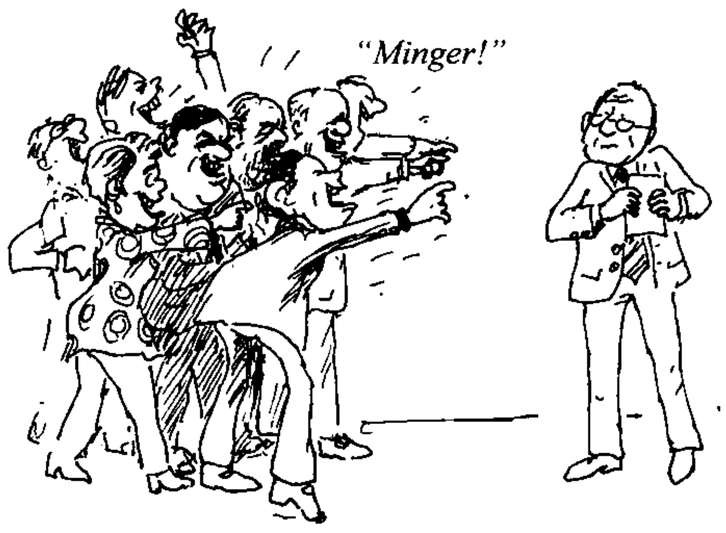


I would like to clarificate my position on the small matter of my failure to pay the council tax due on my free flat (kindly provided by the parish) above the Working Men's Club.

Of course I had every intention of reburserating the trifling sum of £460,000 which had accruated over the last ten years, but due to an unfortunate oversight which I sadly managed to repeat every year, the bill was never paid.

In any case, it is pathetic that people have created such a fuss over such a pilfering matter when there are important issues to be dealt with, ie thousands of cunning old ladies trying to avoid long-term imprisonment by wilfully defying the laws of the land by not paying their council tax. Shame on you grannies, you deserve "a poonch in the kisser" and no mistake!

Yours,
J. Prescott,
The Primary Residence,
Grace and Favour House,
Freebie Lane,
SW1 ZZZ



The vicar and his friends show their 'Respect' for Mr Campbell, the elderly acting leader of the United Reformed Liberal Democrat Church. As seen by Mr de la Nougerede.

Parish Postbag

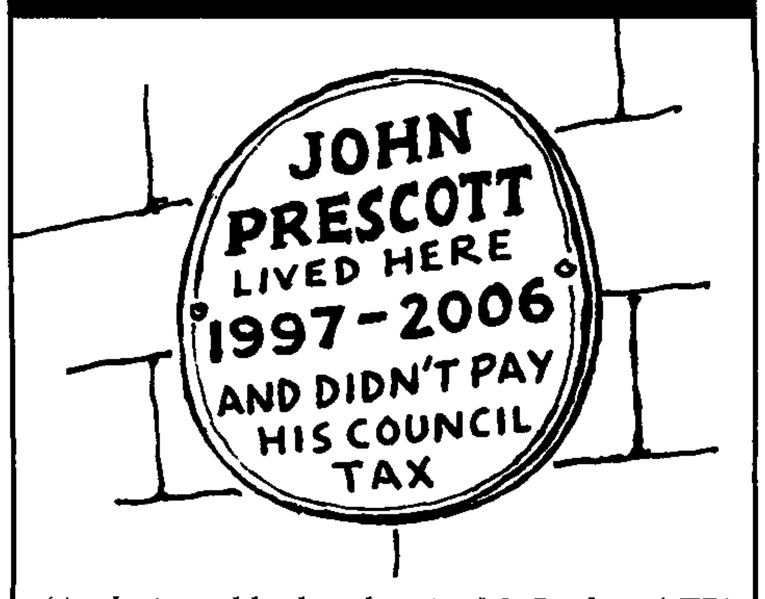
Dear Sir,

I was surprised to read in the St Albion's Clarion that 'Mr Brown had done a first class job with the parish finances'. Without wishing to disparage a former close colleague, I have to say that the view from Brussels is rather different! I would not go so far as to say that Mr Brown has made a complete pig's ear of everything but will confine myself to saying merely that a child of six could have done a better job than this over-rated bungler!

Yours,
P. Mandelson (former churchwarden)
Rue de Matelots, Bruxelles.

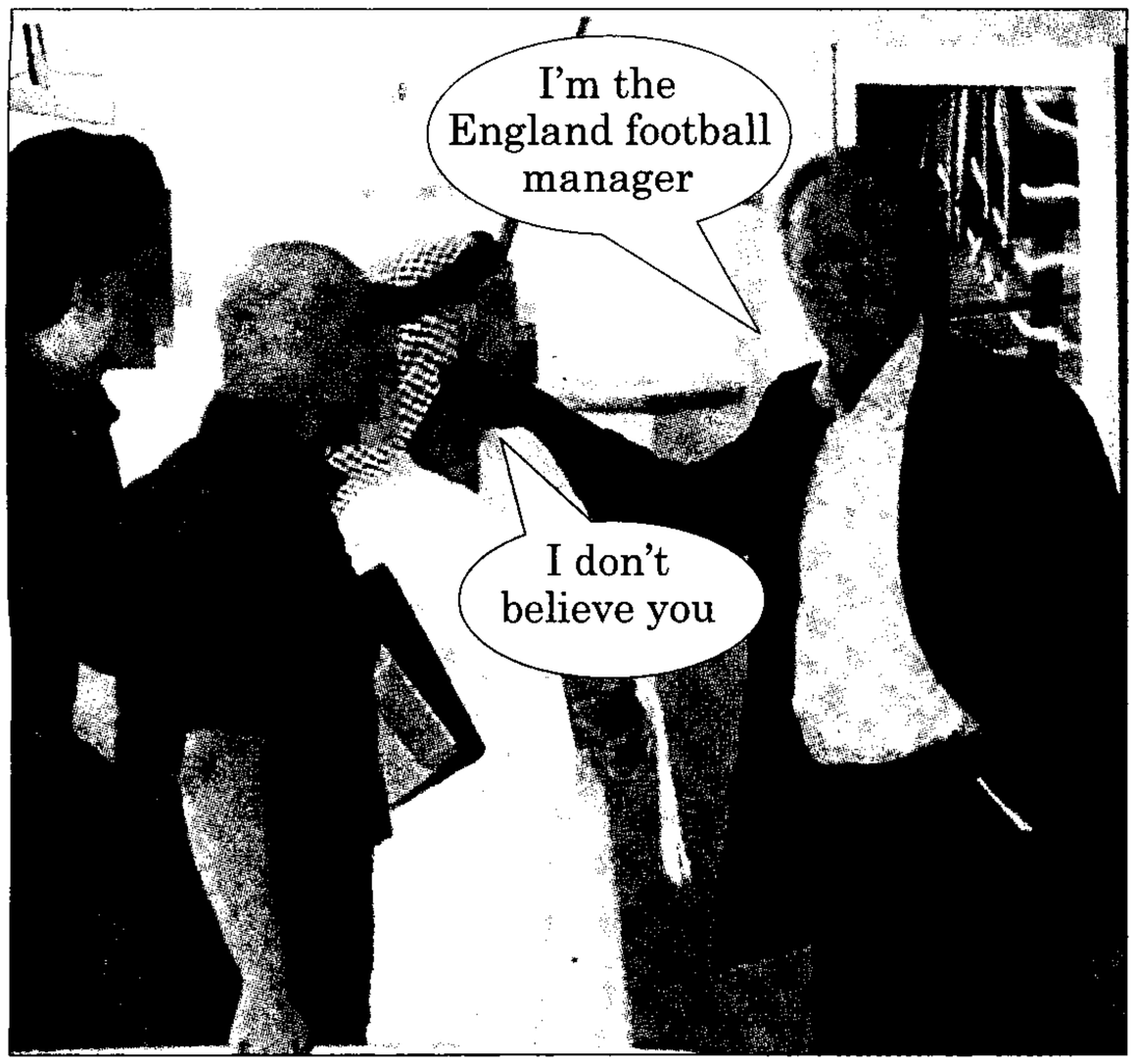
Editor's note: For reasons of space all letters attacking Mr Brown will be printed in full. D.H.

New Blue Plaque in Parish



(As designed by local artist Mr Latham! TB)

SVEN IN AMAZING HOAX



"Fancy that, darling... questioning your commitment"

MAN ON TELEVISION TO MOVE TO ANOTHER CHANNEL

by Our Media Staff
Paul O'Greedy

A MAN on one television channel has moved to another. The man is to be paid more money by the channel he has moved to than the one he was on before.

(Reuters)

Pictures, analysis, full story 1-94

DETOX YOUR DAILY TELEGRAPH!
With The Help Of The Gnome D-Tel Team

THOUSANDS of people start the new year thinking "I feel depressed and irritable. I must have had too much Telegraph".

Now the Gnome team can make you feel 100 years younger by getting rid of all those toxic elements that clog up your Daily Telegraph. Simply follow our three-step programme to total happiness and contentment.

1. **Remove anything in Daily Telegraph written by Max Tomlinson, Ian Marber, Hilary Alexander, Leslie Thomas and Michael Garry** (2-94).
2. **Remove rest of paper.**
3. **Read book.**

Suddenly You're Feeling Fabulous, Truly D-Telified!

EXCLUSIVE TO EYE READERS

THE GNOME HOME SCOOP KIT

Fooling celebrities is easy, thanks to this simple DIY journalist outfit!

Includes:

- ✓ **Tea towel**
- ✓ **White robe**
- ✓ **Spray-on tan**
- ✓ **False beard**
- ✓ **Bottle of champagne**
- ✓ **Tape-recorder in briefcase**

ALL you have to do is book a hotel room and invite your favourite greedy celebrity to come round and, hey presto, scoop's in the bag!

How it will sound:

Fake Arab *(you)*: Hello, celebrity, would you like a million pounds?

Celebrity: Yes, please. I'm very stupid and greedy.

Fake Arab *(you)*: Can you be rude about everyone you know, please – into this briefcase?

Celebrity: Yes, of course. I'll do anything for money.

Fake Arab *(you)*: Allah be praised!

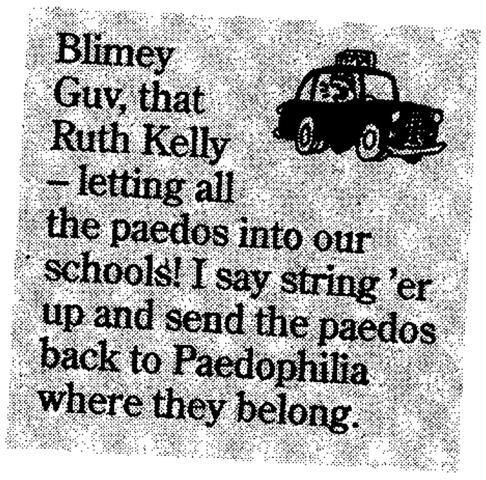
Send now for fully-guaranteed kit for only £99.99 (plus p&p) to:
Gnome Sting Offer, Unit 94,
The Mazher Mahmood Trading Estate, Birmingham.

HE'S BACK! WRITING ONLY IN THE EYE! CONTROVERSIAL, OUTSPOKEN, HILARIOUS! LIKE HIM OR LOATHE HIM, YOU CAN'T HELP LOVING HIM! THE CABBIE! HE'S BACK IN THE EYE WHERE HE BELONGS!

***RICHARD STRINGEMUP** TELLS IT LIKE IT IS FROM HIS VANTAGE POINT IN THE FRONT SEAT OF CAB No. 7321472.*

AND WHO DID THE CABBIE HAVE IN HIS CAB ONLY LAST WEEK ON THE WAY TO HEATHROW? WAS IT SVEN GORAN ERIKSSON? WAS IT GEORGE GALLOWAY? OR WAS IT SIMON HEFFER?

● YOU'LL HAVE TO READ THE CABBIE TO FIND OUT – ONLY IN PRIVATE EYE!!


Blimey Guv, that Ruth Kelly – letting all the paedos into our schools! I say string 'er up and send the paedos back to Paedophilia where they belong.

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES

Ring-a-ring-a-roses,
We've all got cirrhosis

Coming soon – the film they tried to ban!

A CHOCOLATE ORANGE

based on Michael Gove's best-seller "Towards a New Conservatism"

A terrifying picture of Britain in the near-future, where a gang of disaffected youths go round branches of W.H. Smith telling the managers to replace chocolate oranges with fresh fruit – or face the consequences!

Meet "Dave", the ultra-smooth gang leader, whose outward charm conceals a ruthless desire for power.

Around him we see the most frightening gang Britain has ever known, "Gove", "Olly", "Gumbag", "Zac", "Two Brains" and, most terrifying of all, "Boris", the blond sex-fiend who will stop at nothing to get attention!

"It certainly scares the pants off me!"
Simon Heffer, *Daily Telegraph*

Daily Mail

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20, 2006

WHY WAS THIS WOMAN ALLOWED TO WORK WITH CHILDREN?

by Our Education Staff **A Star**

A HUGE row yesterday engulfed Education Secretary Ruth Kelly, 25, when it was revealed that she had been given a top job running a ministry despite the fact that everyone involved knew she was useless.

There are extensive checks and guidelines to ensure that unsuitable characters are kept away from posts connected with children's education.

But in this case it seems all these safety measures were deliberately ignored.

Yet the man responsible for this disastrous system failure, Mr Tony Blair, 53, claims that it was not his decision and that he "knew nothing about it".

The Mail asks: How many other useless politicians have been appointed to top jobs in education?

Is it not time to reopen the files on such previous appointments in this highly sensitive area as David Blunkett, Charles Clarke or even the self-styled "Lord Adonis"?

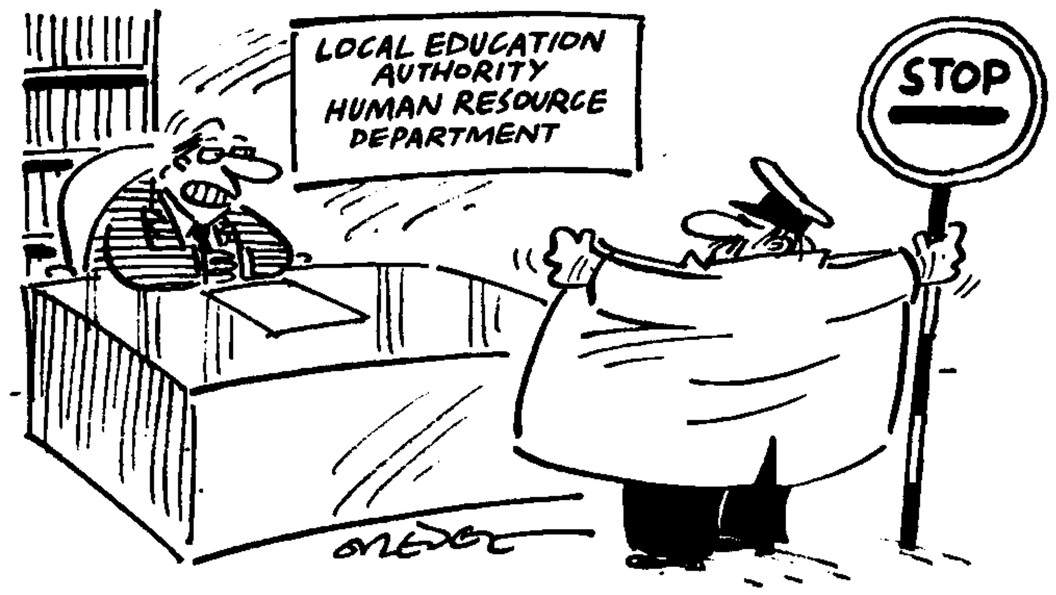
ST CAKES IN 'PAEDOPHILE TEACHER' ROW

by Our Education Staff **Noncy Bonks-Smith**

THE headmaster of St Cakes, the prestigious £30,000-a-term independent boarding school for boys (motto 'Ave Matelotus!'), has admitted that he employed a teacher who is not on the sex offenders' register.

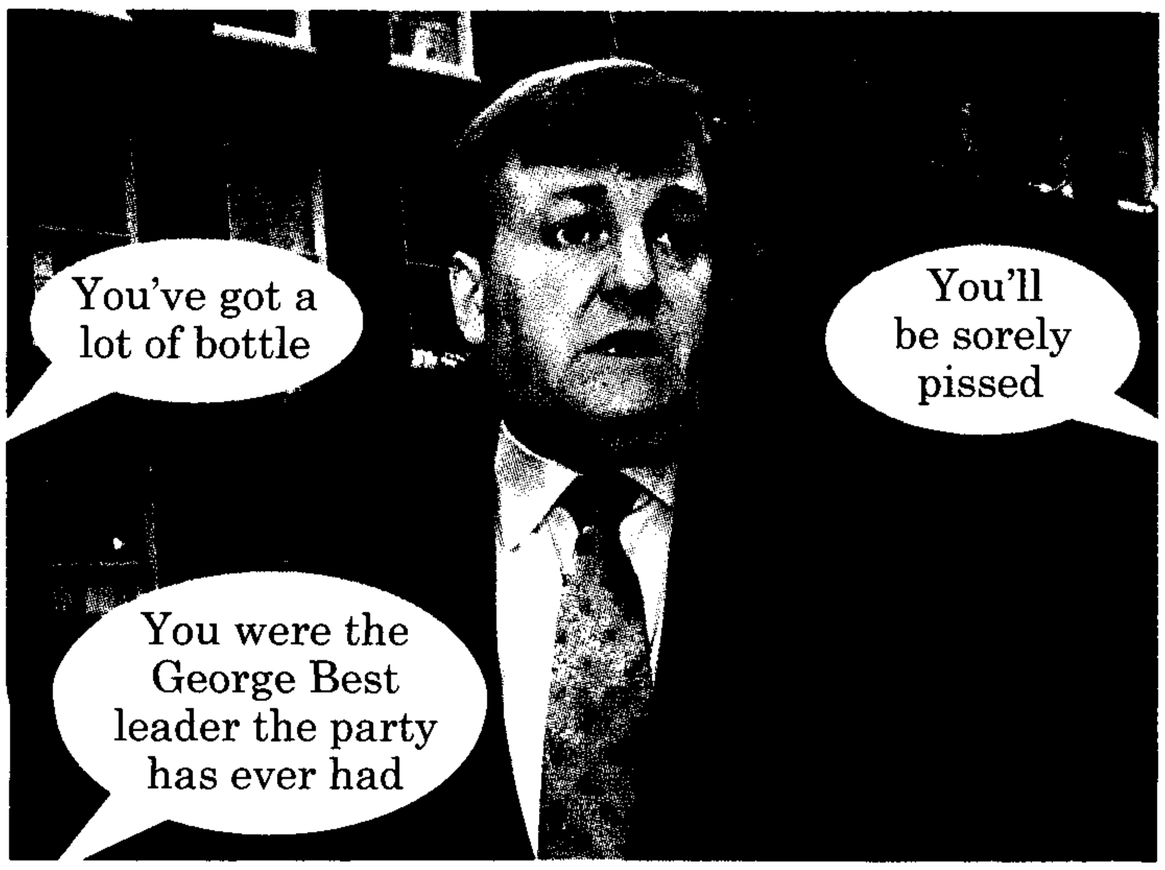
Said a clearly embarrassed Mr R.G.J. Kipling, "It has been brought to my attention that the teacher in question, Mr Straight-Trouser, is under no suspicion at all of being a paedophile. I can only apologise to parents," he continued, "for this appalling oversight. It will not happen again."

Mr Straight-Trouser has been suspended as Master of Buggers and replaced as music teacher by Mr G. Glitter who comes to the school highly recommended by the Thai police authority.



"When can you start?"

LIB DEMS SALUTE BRAVE CHARLES



WHY KENNEDY HAD TO GO

by Lunchtime O'Booze, Dinnertime O'Booze and Breakfast Time O'Booze

YES it's sad – but it was inevitable. Charles Kennedy could no longer hide from the truth. When a man drinks so much that he cannot do his job, it is time to admit it and retire gracefully.

The spectacle of a middle-aged drunk slurring hish wordsh and repeating himshelf and slurring hish wordsh and repeating himshelf is a pitiful shite and cannot be tolerated except in journ...journ...jono... except in the presh.

Sweating, shaking and looking like death, I asked Charles Kennedy if my career was over.

Same Piece Again Please

It says everything about the state of politics today that I have no idea what his reply was.

Still. In the end I knew it was time to go. To the toilet. And then maybe back to the bar for just one more. Line 'em up barman! You're my best friend. Yesh you are. D'you know my editor doesn't understand me? © All newspapers.

Mary Ann Bighead

Around the world in 80 columns

As I sit on the deck of our yacht, Clever Clogs II, while my daughters Brainella (3) and Intelligentsia (7) expertly sail round the world (using only the moon and Neville Maskelyne's lunar distance charts of 1764 to make it harder), news reaches me that Charles Kennedy has resigned over his drink problems.

Readers of the Bighead column will know that I first revealed that Kennedy drank a lot of alcohol as long ago as last year – well ahead of all the other newspaper and television journalists who had no idea.

What's more, my brilliant scoop came hot on the heels of two other extraordinary revelations in this column that shocked the world.

Can I now expect to read that the Pope has finally admitted that he is a Catholic – as I claimed in 2004? Or that members of the Bear Community have confessed that they evacuate their bowels in the woods as I disclosed in 2003?

When I do, it will be a veritable hat-trick of Bighead scoops – but you won't find my crowing about it in my column because I'm too busy sailing around the world being very clever!

© Mary Ann Bighead 2006

Notes & Queries

QUESTION: Why is the acting Liberal leader Sir Menzies Campbell known as "Ming"?

☐IT IS a little-known fact that Sir Menzies, although brought up in Scotland, was born in China, where he came from a long line of Oriental newsagents. Sir Menzies has never denied that he is Chinese, and those who know him well invariably call him "Ming The Useless", after the 15th century leader who briefly occupied the Imperial "Rib Dem" throne, after the assassination of Cha Lee, known as "The Inebriated".

Next week's queries: Who is "Mark Oaten"? What is Simon Hughes? Does anyone care?

Queen Mother Memorial unveiled

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Tony Banks, Merlyn Rees and Golden Wonder Crisps

So. Farewell then
All three of the
Above.

It is hard to see
A link
Between you.

But you will all
Be missed.

Especially the
Crisps.

E.J. Thribb (17½), winner of the Online Poetry Prize 2006 (Judges: Anita Roddick, Sebastian Coe and Mariella Frostrup)

THE CIVIL PARTNERS

"Now we are married does that mean that your parents are coming over to us every Christmas?"

THAT RADIO ONE **DAVID CAMERON** INTERVIEW IN FULL

DJ: Hullo and welcome to the studio the leader of the Conservative Party, the Right Honourable David Cameron MP.

Cameron: Cool! Wicked! Minging!

DJ: Mr Cameron can we talk about your education policies – is it true that you favour streaming and setting rather than selection?

Cameron: Scissor sisters!

Coldplay! Kaiser Chiefs!

DJ: Yes but what about grammar schools – surely this is a betrayal of traditional Tory values?

Cameron: Girls Aloud. The Blonde One. Cor! Eh?

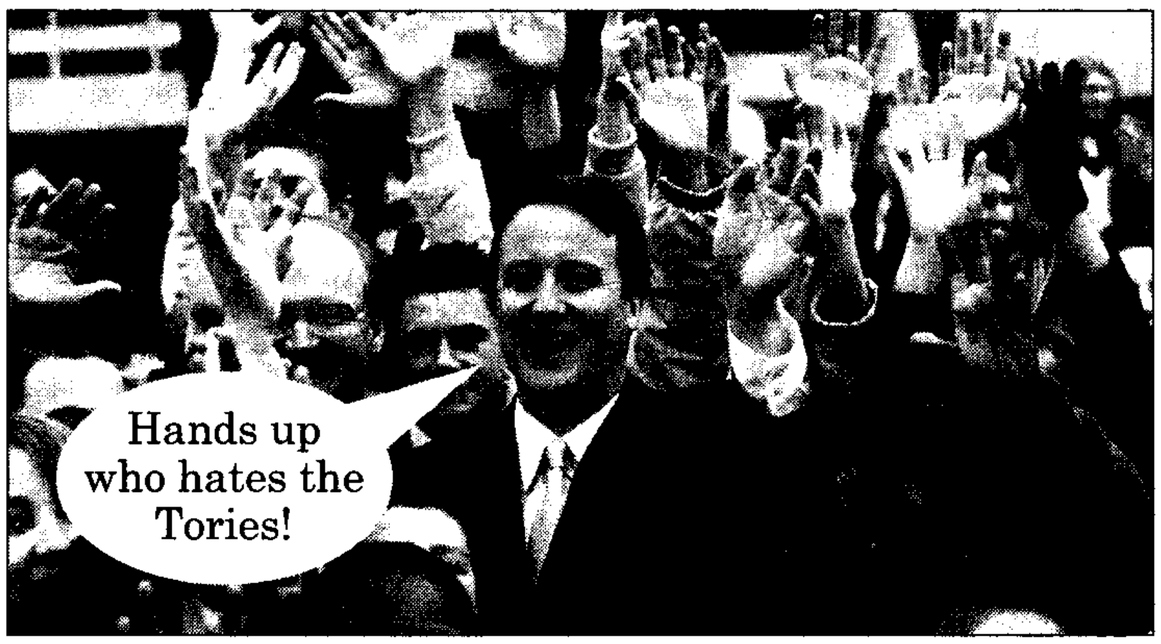
DJ: I gather you have also confirmed your support for the NHS in its current form?

Cameron: Little Britain! Catherine Tate! Ricky Gervais!

DJ: On a lighter note, I suppose I have to ask you about pop.

Cameron: Yes absolutely I was a member at Eton along with Boris Johnson and Ollie Nitwit and Charlie Moore. Bloody good fun! You could wear these spliffing waistcoats with your top hat and tails doncha know?

(The interview had to be terminated at this point when a number of advisors put a sack over Mr Cameron's head and bundled him into a waiting van).



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MATTHEW D'ANCONSERVATIVE

"The Lib Dems should choose Nick Clegg as their leader for one simple reason. He is a nice young bloke like David Cameron, except not quite so nice or young, so he will lose to David who is, after all, the greatest political leader of all time."

SIMON HEFFER

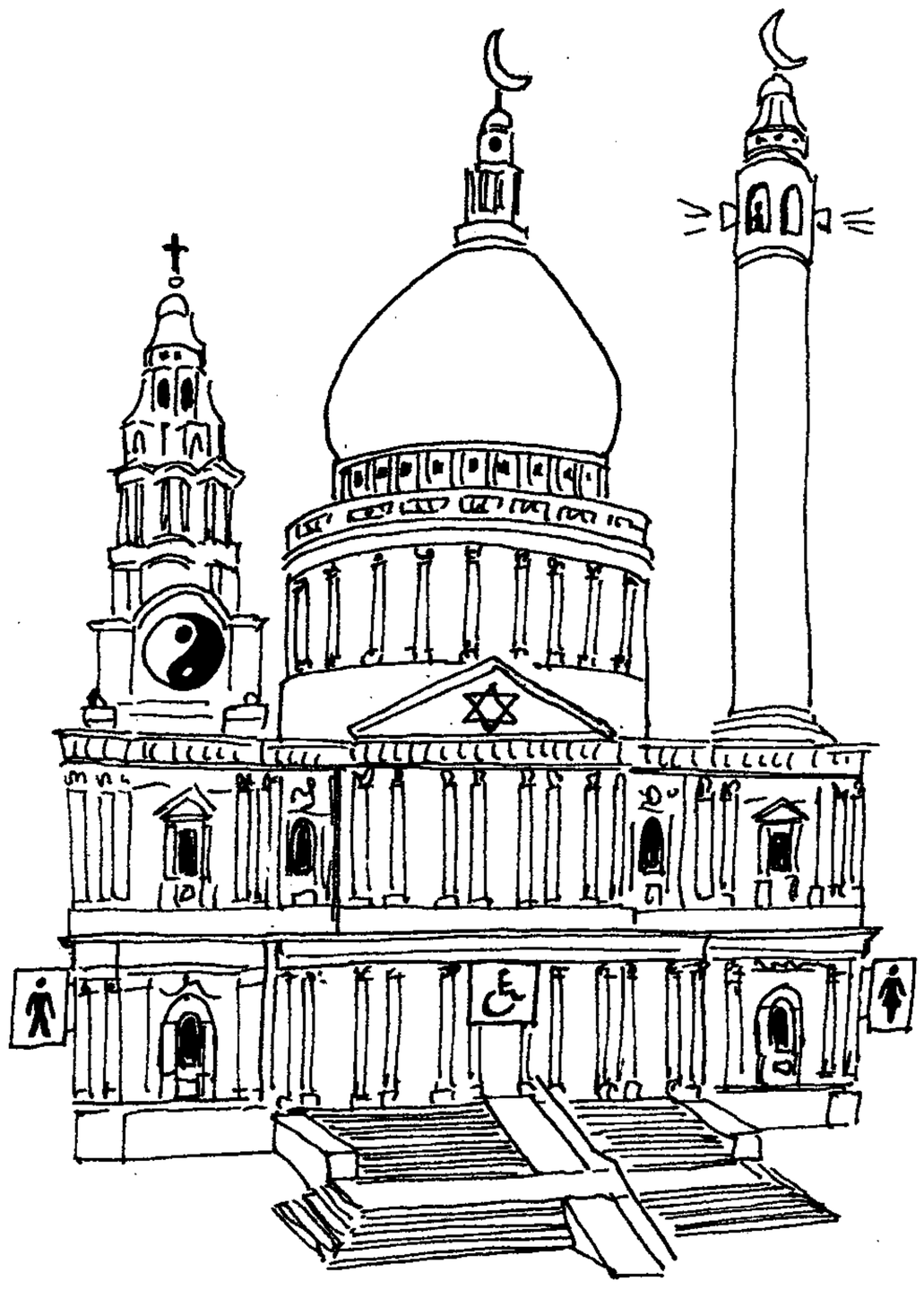
"I don't like the look of this Cameron chap they've got in. Bit of a leftie, if you ask me. It'll all end in tears, mark my words."

BILL DEEDES

"D'you know, I bought one of these new lawn mower things the other day. But you can't make toast in it. Now there's something for young Cameron to think about!"

The New Inclusive St Paul's How It Will Look

As approved by The National Lottery



LOUIS HELLMAN

That Fayed/Chancellor Feud In Full

THE GUARDIAN

The ALEXANDER CHANCELLOR Column

It is some years since I visited Harrods, the once-reputed London department store, but on a trip before Christmas I was surprised to learn that the green braces I was looking for in the Food Hall were nowhere to be found. No wonder that *(contd p. 94)*

Letters and Emails

From Mr Mohamed al-Fayed (British resident living in Switzerland)

Dear Fuggin' Sir,
Your fuggin' columnist Mr Alexander fuggin' Chancellor is well known to be in the pay of the bastard Duke of Edinburgh and if you ask me was one of the secret agents responsible for the fuggin' murder of the Princess of Wales who was pregnant at the time with my grandson, the future King of fuggin' England i.e. King Fayed the First. Who the fug does Mr Fuggin' Chancellor think he is with his old fuggin' Etonian tie and his establishment cronies who will stop at nothing to prevent me, the fuggin' rightful heir to the throne of England, getting a passport, returning to my country and sending the Duke of Edinburgh and his paid assassin, Alexander Chancellor, to the fuggin' Tower of fuggin' London.

Rameses III,
The Great Pyramid, Cairo Road, Egypt.

GALLOWAY – What On Earth Is He Doing In There?

by Our Political Staff PETER O'BORE

DISILLUSIONED supporters of the television personality George Galloway were last night asking what exactly he thought he was doing by entering the House of Commons.

Said one, "George is a very clever and able man, whatever people say, and to see him degrading himself with this bunch of pathetic self-publicists, deadbeats and misfits is tragic, to my mind.

Celeb Dems

"The sight of George trying to talk about serious issues, such as Iraq or Israel, to some nonentity like Hazel Blears is pathetic."

Said another Galloway fan, "I've got a lot of respect for George. But it is offensive to see him late at night hanging about with a bunch of drunks like Charles Kennedy and former drug addicts such as Dave Cameron.

"Why can't George resist the temptation to preen himself in the House, and knuckle down to his career in television?"

Do you want to see George evicted from the House?

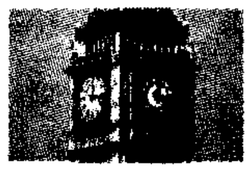
Text us now on 0898-241-241 if you want George to be arrested in connection with the receipt of 2 billion barrels of oil from Saddam Hussein.

The 10 Things Which Best Define What It Is To Be English

After years of consultation and research, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has produced a definitive list of national icons, to help everyone feel that they belong in a very real sense to the England of the 21st century.

Those 10 Tell-tale Icons in Full

1. Big Ben. Historic symbol of English democracy. Always right.

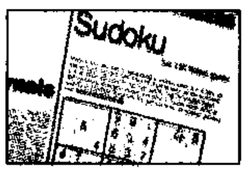


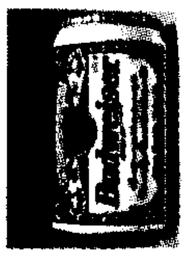
2. Tony Benn. Historic symbol of English democracy. Always left.

3. Chicken Tikka Massala. Historic symbol of English cuisine down the ages.

4. Thierry Henry. Timeless symbol of English football at its best.

5. Sudoku. Timeless symbol of Englishman's love of puzzles.





6. Budweiser lager. Historic symbol of the Englishman's love of getting drunk and being sick in town centres.

7. The Honda Civic. The fashionable English car whose design epitomised the Swinging Nineties.

8. Jamie Oliver's 'Cooking the Italian Way'. Known as the 'Englishman's Food Bible'.

9. The M25 Motorway. Timeless architectural symbol of the Englishman's love of the countryside.

10. Princess Michael of Kent. The fragrant English rose who is the most loved member of Britain's Royal family.

11. The Ikea Furniture Centre, Brent Cross. The ultimate English retail experience for which tourists come from across the world.

12. *(That's enough icons, Ed.)*

Daily Mail Special

Is it true love at last for Blonde Woman?

AFTER a series of doomed relationships with a string of incompatible men, has TV's Blonde Woman finally found the soulmate she deserves?

Last time it was the ironically named Mr Wright who made the Blonde Woman cry.

This time she's fallen head over heels in love with handsome 40-year-old man about town Simon Unsuitable. Mr Unsuitable, who works for the fashion agency Bastards 'R Us, met the Blonde Woman after he had dumped his former attractive Swedish girl-friend Anna Nicepersson.

Says the Blonde Woman: "Simon is everything a woman could want. Reliability is his middle name. Actually it isn't. His real middle name is Loverat."

She continued: "We've been seeing each other for about five minutes so I think it means it's going to last forever."

Blonde Woman: Happy at last?

Mr Unsuitable was quick to agree with his fiancée. "One thing's for sure. I'm not going to treat the Blonde Woman very badly before running off with another blonde – or my name's not Simon Loverat Unsuitable."

• **Late News: Guess what?**

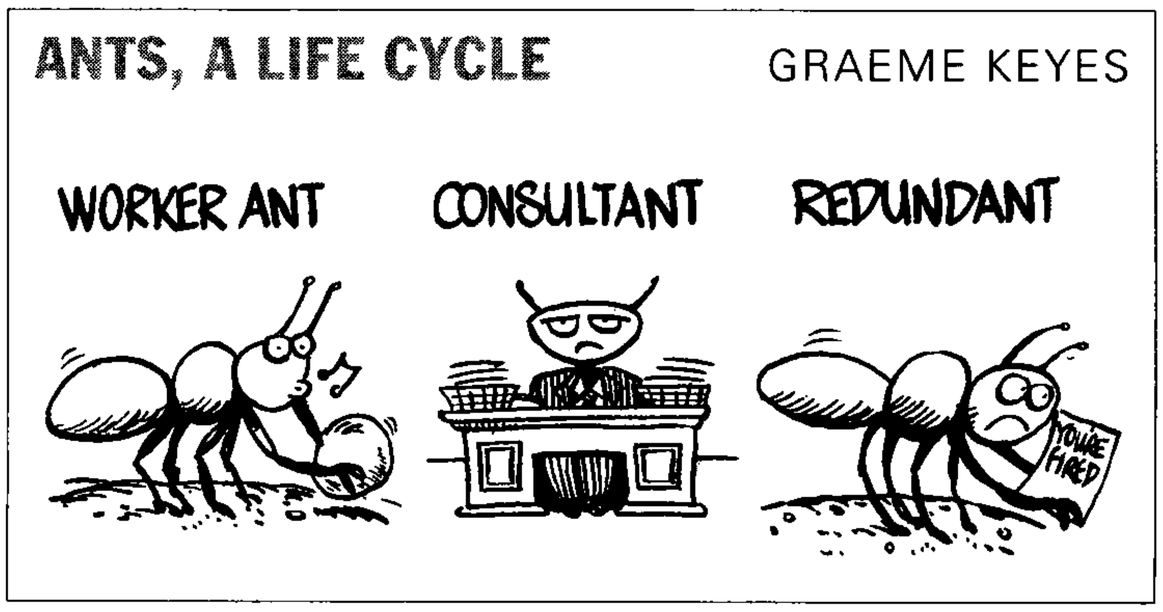
CHILD ISN'T ABDUCTED SHOCK

by Our Social Affairs Staff **Dee Pressing and Sue I. Sidle**

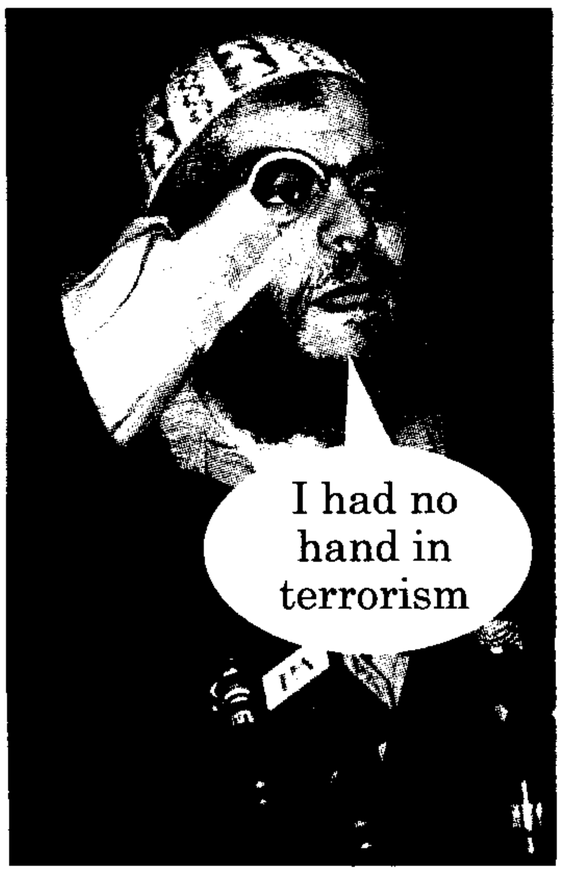
SHOCKING news emerged last night when it was confirmed that a child hadn't been abducted within the last 24 hours.

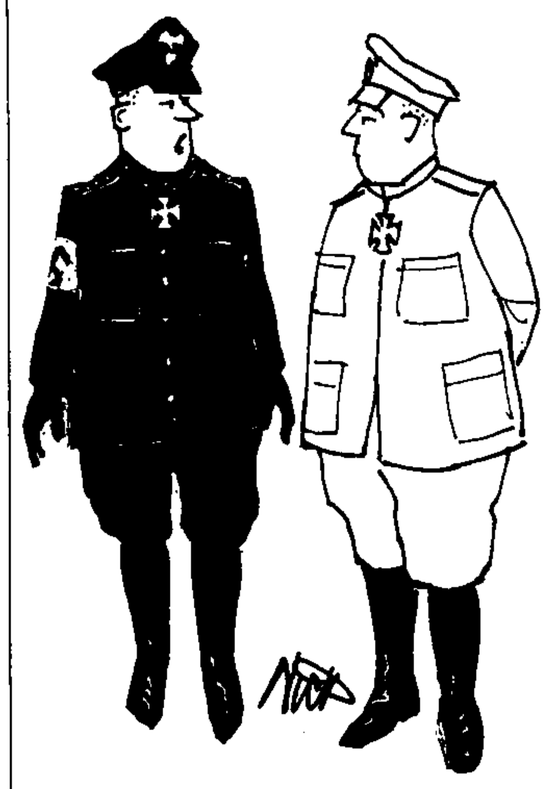
A police spokesman said, "This is a truly shocking development – I can't remember the last time something as disturbing as this didn't happen."

There were also unconfirmed reports that in the same period a teenager was not raped or murdered, a young man was not fatally stabbed and that apparently an old-age pensioner was not battered to death by relatives. (*Reuters*)



HAMZA PLEADS INNOCENCE





"Also, Herman, it forces enemy cartoonists to use more of their precious Indian ink"

END OF BLAIR?

COUNCIL TO BAN VALENTINE'S DAY

by Our Local Government Staff **PC Looney**

THE Midlands council of Market Barkworth has ruled that the town's citizens are not to be permitted to celebrate St Valentine's Day on February 14.

Said the council leader Graham Daft-Bugger, 47, "To celebrate this Christian saint, who probably never existed, could possibly offend Muslims.

"Also," he added, "it is perceived as a heterosexual festival, i.e. it deliberately excludes gays, lesbians and those of trans-gender status, such as myself.

"The good citizens of Market Barkworth are forward-looking, inclusive and modern-minded – they have no time for this kind of sexist elitism based on bigoted and outdated prejudice."

There were angry protests, however, from the Market Barkworth Association of Muslim Newsagents.

Mr Kevin Iqbal, 41, said, "This is political correctness gone mad. The council is trying to destroy our business. Valentine's Day is one of the biggest highlights of the retail calendar, when we expect a high-volume turnover on such items as greeting cards, novelty chocolates shaped as hearts, flowers wrapped in cellophane and special St Valentine Sudoku books for loving couples to do together in bed.

"It is madness gone mad," he continued. "We are lodging an appeal with the European Court of Human Rights. Last year they banned Christmas and Easter. Where will it all end?"

Full story: pp 14-24.

IRAN DEFENDS NUCLEAR POWER AS 'LEGITIMATE'

by Our Persian Staff **Lunchtime O'Mar-Khayam**

THE PRESIDENT of Iran, Mr Mahdmullah Ahmalooni, was yesterday quick to deny that his country's plans to develop nuclear weapons were in any way a threat to world peace.

"Our only desire," he said, "is to put our newly developed nuclear power to peaceful use, such as eliminating Jews from the face of the earth.

"Apart from the much-needed destruction of Israel," he went on, "we have no use for so-called atomic weapons and anyone who says we do is probably Jewish and had better start digging now."

GREAT IRANIAN JOKES NO. 94

Was he the funniest man the Commons has ever known?

The Wit and Wisdom of Tony 'Banksie' Banks

On Ann Widdecombe

■ "She's so fat, she can't get through the door."

On Mrs Thatcher

■ "I hate her. What a cow."

On Nicholas Soames MP

■ "He's so fat, he can't get through the door."

On Tony Blair

■ "I hate him. He's such a cow."

On Iain Duncan Smith

■ "He's so bald, he can't get through the door."

"Banks for the memory" Tone! You were the Oscar Wilde of the House of Commons, and without your sparkle the world will seem a funnier place *(Is this right? Ed.)*

GNOME CLASSIC DVD OFFER

KELLY'S PAEDOS (PG)

Action-packed adventure series in which Ruth Kelly assembles a crack team of paedos to infiltrate primary schools and cause maximum havoc!

EYE RATING: Ideal family entertainment!

Just send your credit card details to Gnome DVD and within 28 days we guarantee that the police will come round and arrest you.

DIARY

CAROLE CAPLIN

Sorry, darling, but I'm here to spread the world about my new television adventure – you're not going to get a squeak out of me about Tony and Cherie however hard you may try!

That's Tony with a 'y' and Cherie with an 'ie'. You've got it. The Prime Minister and his lovely lady. Sweet people, and very dear personal friends. We go back a long way. Cherie lacked confidence bigtime when she first came for a consultation. She's a Virgo and I'm a Capricorn with Jupiter Rising, which means that I'm strong but sensitive, and caring but also very, very intuitive, so we could have had issues, but not at all.

Sorry, I'm not going to give away any secrets – much as the media may want me to – but when I asked Cherie how her stools were she confessed they were what I call a teensy bit pebbly, and they weren't floating. I held her hand and looked her straight in the eye.

"To me, Cherie, this shows we must zoom in on your nutrition and water intake," I said, "with particular reference to fibre content. And while we're tackling the stool question, let's put our minds to getting you into some looser fitting outfits. You know what I think, Cherie? I think amber would suit your skin-tones. Amber in the morning, magenta in the afternoon, possibly vermillion for evening-wear. And tell me this, Cherie, do you ever experience constipation after a long drive?"

Sorry, my lips are shut tight on anything to do with Downing Street. You should get out more – there's so much more to the whole Carole Caplin project than THAT! But Cherie did confirm that yes, constipation could be a problem after a long drive.

"It's only normal, Cherie," I said. "Anxiety can play havoc with the bowels. So are you the anxious sort of person, would you say, Cherie? You are? I see. And what about Tony?"

By the end of that first session, the two of us had become firm friends. I'm not giving any secrets away, but I was soon in and out of Number 10 virtually every hour of the day, dispensing life-saving advice, usually with my leotard already on underneath.

And it was there, oddly enough, that I first had the very great pleasure of meeting Gordon Brown.

"I hope you don't mind my asking, Gordon," I said to him as we were shaking hands. "But the slight tinge of sweat on your upper lip suggests to me a build-up of toxic waste pushing back from the bowels of the body, resulting in a slightly unpleasant smell and sometimes occasioning irritability and even unhappiness in the human being inside. Am I right, Gordon?"

I'm giving away no secrets when I reveal that it was me who encouraged Gordon to open his mouth in an 'O' shape at the end of each sentence, and to keep it open nice and wide for just a few seconds. This helps build up the inner confidence, introduces valuable air into the head, and cuts back on all sorts of accumulated status anxiety.

I'm not saying I helped run the economy, I wouldn't go so far as that, and anyway it's a big secret, but when I first met him Gordon was experiencing an emotional blockage when it came to his sums, but after I'd talked it through with him and given him one or two easy exercises and got him to wear more lilac and sky blue, well, it wasn't long before he had inflation under control.

I don't know Charles Clarke quite as well as some of the others. Kim from Hear'Say. Janet Street-Porter. Reg Varney of On the Buses fame. Jodie Marsh. Una Stubbs. Betty Boothroyd. Leading Bay City Roller Derek Longmuir. Top historian David Starkey. The list of celebrities who have developed The Carole Caplin Habit is endless.

They tell me they come to me for my simple, hard-won wisdom. "Tears are your face's way of telling you you're not a happy bunny," is one of my mottos. And another is: "Look both ways before you cross a busy road."

My super, super mum Sylvia – she remains a principal adviser to former Pan's Person Dee Dee, and personal fitness trainer to former newscaster Kenneth Kendall – once said to me, Carole, you've got an old head on young shoulders, but that was before I had Botox. Anyway, where was I? Charles Clarke. I wouldn't pretend to say I know Charles well, but I'm giving nothing away when I tell you he's been experiencing a slight runniness in his stools recently, and his skin maintains its tendency to be dry and ever-so-slightly puffy.

So I sometimes pop round to The Home Office, where Charles works – taking care to don a leopard-skin body-stocking so as to avoid the attentions of the press – just to make absolutely certain Charles is sticking to the regime I've sculpted for him. And believe me all hell breaks loose if ever I catch him with his head buried deep in a burger and fries! Bless!

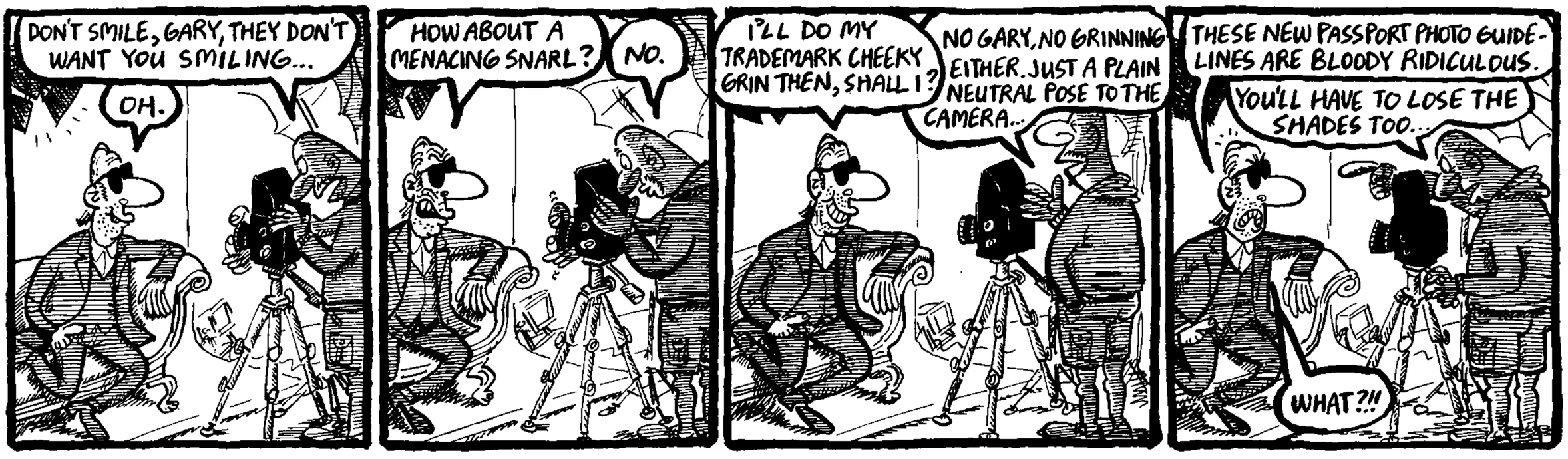
Yes, Charles has personal issues to conquer, and he'd be the last to deny it. But I'm slowly teaching him to overcome his deepest fears, and I've let him see that being Home Secretary is a great way of coming to terms with low self-esteem. Wearing more lovely browns and gorgeous beiges is another way of doing it, and sending more young offenders to prison is another.

I've at last got him slipping into a kaftan in his lunch-break, cutting back on the carbohydrates, and wearing a bio-electric shield around his neck formed from a matrix of specially cut quartz crystals, thus forming a cocoon of positive energy. Most important of all, it's worked. There's already been a 9 per cent downturn in crimes of violence, and speeding offences in England and Wales have been cut in half since last summer.

That's the Carole Caplin Treatment for you – but then Charles is an Aries, which makes him very open to accepting advice from those more grounded in the wisdom of the ancients than his own good self. And I'd love to see him in fawn slacks and an off-white polo neck.

But for now it's only his stools that we have to knock into shape. At regular intervals I've been taking transparencies of them on my digital camera for my new photo-anthology, "Cabinet Stools". I hope it will help others, because I'm not in it for myself. As the whole world must surely recognise by now, I'm a very private person.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


DON'T SMILE, GARY, THEY DON'T WANT YOU SMILING...
OH.
HOW ABOUT A MENACING SNARL?
NO.
I'LL DO MY TRADEMARK CHEEKY GRIN THEN, SHALL I?
NO GARY, NO GRINNING EITHER. JUST A PLAIN NEUTRAL POSE TO THE CAMERA...
THESE NEW PASSPORT PHOTO GUIDELINES ARE BLOODY RIDICULOUS.
YOU'LL HAVE TO LOSE THE SHADES TOO...
WHAT?!!

Literary Review

Screen idle

Sellevision
Augusten Burroughs
(Atlantic, £7.99)

The Diviners, Rick Moody
(Faber, £12.99)

Cleaver, Tim Parks
(HarvillSecker, £16.99)

HERE, by coincidence of the publishing lists, are three writers, all known for a particular schtick, who have decided to try something a bit different.

Until now, Mr Burroughs has been associated with spectacular autobiographical revelation (how momma gave me away, how I beat the bottle) in books such as *Running With Scissors* and *Dry*. Mr Moody has been the explorer of sensitive American males in fiction including *The Ice Storm* and *Purple America*. Mr Parks is known as the Europhile of English literary fiction, sending in from his Italian exile fables of intellectual and physical endurance such as *Europa*, *Shear* and *Rapids*. But now, by chance, the trio want a change of tone and, even more against the odds, each has simultaneously decided that the means to reinvention will be a satire about television.

In *Sellevision*, Augusten Burroughs sets up and then sends up a 24-hour shopping channel. The book starts with Max, star gay presenter, accidentally showing shoppers his chopper while modelling slumberwear on screen. The sacked Max descends through cheap news channels to become a porn star while, back at *Sellevision*, the new network star, serene Peggy Jean, devout Christian mother of two, is progressively destroyed by a stalker and a substance abuse problem.

Rick Moody's *The Diviners* doesn't initially seem to be about television but that older showbiz target for literary fiction, the movies. The central character, Vanessa Meandro, is an independent movie producer. In fact, to be frank, the book's initial subject seems to be diarrhoea. The novel's first chapter is, in the favoured Dirty Realist style of modern American fiction, a detailed 15-page description of what comes out of the ass of a subsidiary character as she sits on the can during a bout of ulcerative colitis.

But, after a couple of rolls of paper, Moody, like Burroughs, settles down to tell us that the real crap-box these days is TV. Vanessa's firm becomes desperate to develop the current small-screen buzz-project: *The Diviners*, a multi-part historical epic which begins in Mongolia and ends with Mormons looking for water in the desert.

The problem for Tim Parks, after he decided to write about television, is that he then faced the technical challenge of how a chap whose fiction specialises in existential crises suffered by mountaineers and who has been living out of England for years is going to get right the details about inter-active red buttons and who won *Big Brother* in 2003.

The solution, in *Cleaver*, is that top presenter Harold Cleaver (sort of Paxo rolled into Melvyn, with a dusting of Frost on top) suffers an existential crisis after interviewing the American president and flees by train through Europe before holing up in a cabin at the top of an Austrian alp.

In his high, icy retreat, Harold is desperate to forget his life in television, which is lucky because it means that his inner voice can be short on the sort of pesky technical detail which might require research. Luckily for Parks, by the time we meet Cleaver, he has boiled his whole TV career down inside his head to "the years of celebrity interviews, shooting scripts and political punditry".

But, for Parks, as for Burroughs and Moody, television is just a metaphor: an image of the vacuity and vanity of modern culture. The television personnel in all three books are monsters of egotism, obsessed with work which is entirely ephemeral and particularly inflamed by the ratings these shows attract. Crucially, Cleaver, in the Parks novel, is brought down by literature. His son writes a best-selling memoir about what a self-obsessed prat his famous dad is. A key character weakness revealed in junior's biography is that the journalist obsessively read the newspapers every morning.

Well, sure. And it's just lucky that Parks, Burroughs and Moody, in making these attacks on television, are themselves working in a field – literary fiction – where egotism and vanity are unknown and where you certainly never find publishers worrying about their equivalent of ratings: sales.

Even so, a telly exec reading these critiques of the medium might wonder if, for example, Parks might not benefit from reading the newspapers occasionally himself: he might then be able to fill in a bit more international background than occasional references to "the American President". And is Moody absolutely sure that his writing – which includes for example, a ten-page sequence in which every sentence begins with the words "Light upon" – is automatically superior to the use of language in *The West Wing*, *Desperate Housewives* or *Six Feet Under*.

It's unlikely that *Sellevision*, *The Diviners* or *Cleaver* will ever be adapted by television. The writers will convince themselves that's because they're too close to home. Another view might be that no one would want them in their homes.

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS

Constitutional
Helen Simpson
(Cape, £14.99)

Sometimes they talked in the car and sometimes they talked a lot.

"Mum?"

"Yes?"

"Am I allowed to say spermatozoa?"

"I don't see why not. Have you got your inhaler? And the cheque for the ski-trip?"

"*Mum.*"

He was the only one in the world who listened to her, Ariadne reflected, and did what she said. Not like Patrick, her husband, who lay in the bath worrying about his pension contributions. Misery was like a tree, she thought: the topmost branches might hang far above you, but they still had the capacity to fall on your head.

"I remember when I was at school," she said, wondering what had happened to the Coldplay CD. "My mind was full of girlish dreams, and the summer afternoons seemed to roll on for ever like the squares in a patchwork quilt. But now..."

"You're a loser, mum," her daughter Tallulah had told her the other day. "Xanthe's mother's got a shop in Bruton Street selling designer jewellery, and Araminta's mum's having an affair with Pete Doherty."

Sometimes the terrible struggle of the school, this merciless crawl through foul air and the black talons of malevolent rain, gave her, Ariadne, pause. The journey took forty-five minutes, forty-two if you took a devious left-hand turn along Murgatroyd Avenue, forty-six if you stalled at the roundabout.

"Mum," said Toby again, from the back seat. "Will you test me on my Hebrew?"

They turned right into the Finchley Road, past the shop that had those nice hanging baskets and the deli that did the goats' milk cheese.

"Mum," said Tallulah. "Can I have my nose pierced? Can I?"

It was so hard, Ariadne reflected, so nutritionless, this cramped bourgeois existence. Lying awake at night in your mid-terrace semi, negotiating the M25 in your BMW, pondering the landscape from the window of your *gite* in the Dordogne, your mind ran away with you, constructed unappeasable phantoms for you to chase. And then you came awake to find the au pair had measles and the French windows were jammed shut. Stalled, stymied, silenced.

The school gates loomed, the 4X4s tussling before them like embattled dinosaurs. Silently the children disembarked. Deserted, she thought, abandoned, bereft. Suddenly Toby's face appeared at the window.

"Spermatozoa," he said. "Bye mum."

The brief, epiphanic moment hung above them in the dense and terrible sky.

What the press said:

"Speaks to us all" – Polly Filler, *Guardian*.

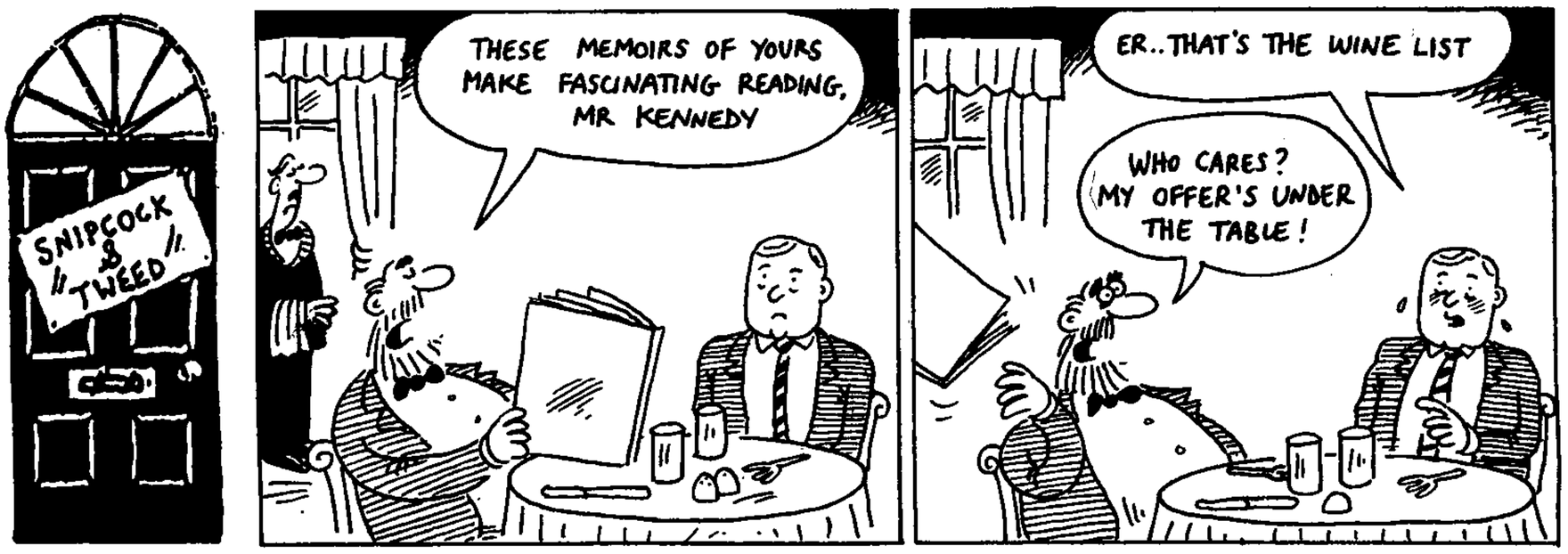
BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ THE surprise decision of Alan "Weasel" Giles to retire as HMV ceo (was he pushed or was he shoved?) to "develop a portfolio of non-executive roles", has overshadowed the departures of David Roche and marketing manager Lesley Miles to develop a portfolio of daytime television viewing.

Even the omnipotent buying boss Scott Pack is believed to be looking at job offers from the publishers whose destiny he currently controls very seriously indeed. Following the Office of Fair Trading's decision to refer the HMV bid for Ottakar's to the Competition Commission and a Christmas in which sales were down considerably on last year, Waterstone's HQ at Brentford is in turmoil.

Meanwhile, over in Salisbury, Ottakar's managed to achieve roughly the same sales as last Christmas, despite a depressed pattern of trading in the second half of the year. Does the Weasel's exit mean the end for the Ottakar's bid? The official line is that HMV "intends to pursue vigorously its position". However, with Giles spending the next 12 months tidying his desk and Brentford having trouble making a coin from the shops it already has, maybe the desire will wane. Perhaps then Ottakar's should make an offer for Waterstone's?

'Bookworm'


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
THESE MEMOIRS OF YOURS MAKE FASCINATING READING, MR KENNEDY
ER..THAT'S THE WINE LIST
WHO CARES? MY OFFER'S UNDER THE TABLE!

Pseuds Corner

Let's get one thing clear. This is the golden age – so far. There has never been a better time to be alive in Britain than today, no generation more blessed, never such opportunity for so many. And things are getting better all the time, horizons widening, education spreading, everyone living longer, healthier, safer lives. Unimaginable luxuries are now standard – mobile phones sending pictures everywhere, accessing the universe on the internet and iPods with all the world's music in your ear.

POLLY "ANNA" TOYNBEE
Guardian

He's just out of bed, where he's been on the phone to his wife, or the prime minister of a large nation, or Bob Dylan, or Bill Gates, or Paul Allen, or, somehow, himself, or some other version of himself he has left in some other part of the world at some time that might not yet have happened.

PAUL MORLEY on Bono
Observer Music Monthly

Ideal travelling companion

The fashion stylist Isabella Blow – there's never a dull moment travelling with her. We have travelled together several times to locations all over the world. She recently came to Ireland with me and we provided her with a police escort from the airport, because if anyone deserves one, she does. After leaving the airport she realised she had left her luggage and had to turn around.

PHILIP TREACY
Independent

To subvert the associations of "male energy" with Jackson Pollock's splatter paintings, Long created a bra which squirts paint through the nipples. She has also sold her knickers in vending machines in museums and galleries. 'I wear them once and attach a written diary of the day on which I wore them.'

***The Times* on San Franciscan artist**
LAURA LONG

Pseuds Educational

The lecturer plays the key role at the interface between the College and the student

Keighley College advertisement for a post in Health and Social Care

Pseuds Corporate

Join us in Tower 42 in a vendor agnostic environment, where we will be exploring the different components involved in a self-service contact centre and investigating the perceived benefits and risks. This seminar will cover examples of how different industries have deployed strategies and how they have managed to counteract any negative effects of self-service.

Advertisement

CONTRIBUTORS: Chris Denham, Matthew Wilson, Colin Clarke, Robert Pirrie, Kate Bacon, John Laird.

IN THE BACK

Mapeley

Seven STEPS to haven?

MAPELEY, the offshore property company to which the Revenue and Customs infamously sold their offices under the STEPS PFI contract, is enjoying a dramatic turnaround in fortunes on the back of payments well above what the deal should be costing the taxpayer – and has moved to yet another haven to dodge even more tax!

When the company announced plans to sell shares on the stock exchange last June the *Eye* (issue 1134) speculated on where the £73m profits it boasted of for 2004 might have come from, since in December 2001, just seven months into the contract, its under-priced bid had forced it to go back to the government, cap in hand. Could it have been the claims Mapeley made for more money amid concerns that it might collapse?

Now, with the public listing of the company's shares forcing publication of its results, it emerges that much higher than expected payments under the deal are indeed responsible for the bulk of the expanding profits.

Mapeley's 2004 figures show that its "outsourcing" operations made operating profits of £46m. But that includes what appear to be significant losses on its only other contract, with Abbey National, suggesting profits from STEPS were around the £55m to £60m mark. After some other costs and interest, that means Mapeley cleared at least £35m from HM Revenue and Customs. And results for the first three-quarters of 2005 show even higher profits, indicating a pattern that could continue for the remaining 16 years of the contract. (So well are things going that when Mapeley appointed three new non-executive directors in June, it handed each of them more than £100,000 worth of shares for free – to them that is, not to the taxpayers who will ultimately pay for them.)

Such riches are a far cry from the claims made by the company to parliament in 2002 that "the STEPS contract economics are marginal for Mapeley on an operating basis. Mapeley shareholder returns therefore rely upon capital gains on the valuable properties towards the end of the contract term [in 2021]" – a plea of poverty completely contradicted by £17m worth of dividends, ie "shareholder returns", in 2005. But when the *Eye* put the profit figures to Mapeley and reminded the firm of its assurances to parliament, the company simply refused to comment.

Meanwhile HMRC has told the *Eye* that the basic facility price payments on the contract in 2004/05 were £197m before VAT, suggesting £231m on the standard VAT-inclusive basis and repeating similar figures for past years (see *Eye* 1112). Even adjusted to 2001 prices using the exaggerated discount rates then employed by the government to favour PFI deals, more than half the predicted £1.43bn cost of STEPS has been spent in the first four years of the 20-year contract, indicating a huge over-shoot and a final bill well in excess of the £1.83bn that it would have cost to keep the buildings in the public sector – a prospect that HMRC declined to comment on.

Mapeley naturally doesn't intend to pay any tax on its juicy profits despite doing all its business and having its head office in the UK. When it needed to set up a new holding company (Mapeley Ltd) last year to list on the London stock exchange, it incorporated it not in the UK but in Guernsey, where it won't be taxed at all on the profits it receives from the Bermudan companies that make all the money.

At least that's the theory – but it's not always so simple. With chief executive Jamie Hopkins based in London, and two Americans and another Brit on the board – compared with just one token Guernsey resident (the island's deputy Treasury minister Charles Parkinson) – HMRC might be expected to question whether for tax purposes Mapeley Ltd really is resident in Guernsey. That depends on whether its directors truly run it from the island, which would require countless contrived trips over the Channel before making any major business decisions. And for the overall scam to work, sunnier jaunts must be made by the directors (whose identities, true to secretive form, Mapeley wouldn't reveal) of the companies that are registered in Bermuda: the inaptly named Mapeley UK Company Ltd and the outfit that owns the properties, Mapeley Steps Ltd.

Any challenge to the tax structure from sceptical tax inspectors could, however, bring the whole edifice crashing down, and with it one of the government's most controversial PFI deals. Officials might not therefore be encouraged by their bosses who signed the STEPS contract to go after Mapeley with the same vigour as they would other multinationals up to such convoluted offshore avoidance.

And if the taxmen are reluctant, now that the government's and Mapeley's assurances about the costs, the profits and the amount of tax avoided are all shown to be false, will the NAO or parliament return to arguably the most outrageous PFI deal on record?

IRAQ'S WMD

Invisible stink

MORE on Saddam Hussein's attempts to buy uranium from Niger in an attempt to build nuclear weapons. In the latest twist to this saga, the UK Foreign Office has managed to make a set of documents relating to Iraq's non-existent WMD appear... then disappear.

Dr Lynne Jones, the Labour MP for Birmingham Selly Oak who is pursuing the basis for Tony Blair's pre-war claim that Iraq was seeking nuclear material from Africa, received a letter last summer from Foreign Office Minister Baroness Symons. In it Symons said the government believed in the illicit Iraq-Niger uranium deal because "our assessment was made on the basis of documents other than those which have been subsequently found to have been forged".

Really? Dr Jones was surprised by the claim that the government had reliable documents other than the Italian forgeries (see *Eyes passim*) which outlined the apparent WMD deal. No other government, for example, claims to have credible documents outlining the uranium-deal-that-never-happened. Nor had British intelligence ever made such a claim before. Indeed, the 2003 report of the Commons intelligence and security committee made it clear that the intelligence service was relying on non-documentary "intelligence" – a telephone call, say, or a report by an agent or the comments of another foreign intelligence service – to continue believing that Iraq had tried to procure Nigerien atomic ore.

Dr Jones wrote to Symons' successor, Foreign Office Minister Kim Howell, for an explanation. After some reminding the minister replied just before Christmas... and promptly made Symons' "documents" disappear.

Howells wrote: "I agree that the wording of the letter you received was not as precise as it should have been. Instead of stating 'our assessment was made on the basis of documents...' the letter should have read 'our assessment was made on the basis of information...' I hope this helps to clarify the issue for you."

And how. Howell's letter makes it clear that ministers still don't know what they are talking about when it comes to Iraq's supposed weapons of mass destruction.

MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE I

Rocks and a hard place

THOSE campaigning for Gordon Park, jailed for killing his wife in the high-profile "Lady in the Lake" case, will hold a vigil outside Manchester prison on Saturday 28 January to mark the first anniversary of his conviction. Foremost among those who believe Park innocent and who will be handing out flyers that raise a series of crucial questions about the case, will be his son, Jeremy, a 35-year-old IT consultant.

Carol Park disappeared from her home in July 1976. But as she had previously left home periodically to have affairs with other men, no one thought her disappearance strange and Park, a schoolteacher, did not initially report her missing. One man with whom she lived for almost a year in 1974-5 was a former police officer. Her whereabouts remained a mystery until her heavily trussed-up body was found on the bed of Coniston Water in the Lake District in August 1997.

Park was immediately arrested for her murder and briefly held in Preston prison; but the charge was dropped in January 1998 through lack of evidence. However, Park was rearrested in January 2004 and stood trial from November 2004 to January 2005. So what evidence did the police have in 2004 that they didn't have in 1998?

The first stemmed from a comparison of the knots tying the "body parcel" with those from Park's house, garage and boat. It was a report from the prosecution's knots expert, Mike Lucas, that led to the murder charge being reinstated.

As the case went to trial, however, Lucas read a defence report and (to his credit) retracted his conclusions and withdrew. The knot patterns were not similar at all. In Park's own knots, there were more half-hitches than any other kind of knot; yet there wasn't a single half-hitch on the body parcel. Conversely, the single most-used knot on the body was a granny knot; and there was not a single such knot among all those on Park's property.

The prosecution also exhibited a piece of Westmorland green slate found on the lake bed in 2004 which was held to be "very similar" to slate on Park's house. At trial, however, this evidence collapsed. As the judge, Mr Justice McCombe told the jury, even the prosecution acknowledged that "slate had been worked in the Coniston area for hundreds of years" and this piece "could have come from anywhere".

Then there was a rock, said to have been found on the lake bed with some clothing, around 70m away from the body. The prosecution asserted that it corresponded closely to rocks in Park's garden wall. However, while he was giving evidence, the police diver who had supposedly found the rock was shown it. His response was unexpected, he fainted. "It was," commented the judge, "a bit of a shock." No one knows why he fainted, but his evidence contradicted the Crown's case. After recovering, the police diver testified that if he had noticed a rock during his dive (which he hadn't), he would have left it where it was. On top of this a geological expert for the defence said that far from the rock having been in the lake for 21 years, there was no evidence that it had been in water at all.

And finally there was also – just like in the Robert Kennedy case (see this page) the classic cell-confession. While steadfastly maintaining his innocence to family, friends and lawyers, Park, in his brief stay in Preston prison, is said to have suddenly confessed to two prisoners. One has a severe learning disability and is, according to psychiatric reports, "highly suggestible"; the other has used cannabis for the last 14 years, "suffers memory loss and hears voices". Hardly surprising, then, that the accounts Park is said to have given to each did not match – another reason for doubting whether Park had ever told them anything at all.

Park had no criminal record whatever, and medical records of which he had been unaware revealed that Carol Park had told a doctor in 1975 that Park had never used violence or threats towards her. The family believe there are other suspects or former lovers who are violent.

But the most convincing evidence pointing towards Mr Park's innocence, according to his family, is that their mother was seen alive after Park was supposed to have murdered her. On the day that she "disappeared", Mr Park had taken his two children to Blackpool for the day. After they had gone, a VW beetle was seen parked on the family's driveway for more than 20 minutes. Neither the car nor the male driver has ever been identified.

Another neighbour also saw Mrs Park on her driveway that day. But later that evening, at about 6pm, she was seen by another friend at a service station on the southbound carriage of the M6.

"Why hasn't the VW driver come forward or been found?" asks Jeremy Park. "Where was my mother going that evening? There were such big holes in the prosecution case, we never ever believed my father would or could be convicted."

Now the family hopes that new geological and other expert evidence, coupled with concerns about material that have gone missing in the case, will lead to a speedy appeal.

MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE II

Plymouth unsound

HOW much evidence does the Criminal Cases Review Commission need before referring a dodgy murder conviction back to the court of appeal?

Early last summer it became clear that a police re-investigation of a 16-year-old murder had brought to light new evidence casting doubt on the conviction of Robert Kennedy, a fairground worker, who was jailed for life for the murder of a gay Plymouth pensioner, Arthur Eathorne.

Kennedy, now 41, has always maintained his innocence. He was convicted on the basis of so-called "cell-confession" evidence to fellow inmates – often a factor for concern in miscarriage of justice cases where there is little other damning evidence. But the inmate confession was coupled with forensic evidence, suggesting that one of the many visitors to Mr Eathorne's flat before he was fatally struck over the head with a blunt instrument was someone described as a "non-secretor" – a person whose blood type cannot be identified from other bodily fluids, such as saliva.

Traces on cigarette ends found at the flat were said to have been left by a non-secretor and Mr Kennedy fitted the bill. However, being a non-secretor is not exactly unusual: one in four of the population is.

That forensic evidence, it seems, was also a factor in the decision not to pursue an original suspect, Paul Jennings, who had admitted visiting Mr Eathorne for sex, some time before the murder. The non-secretor was said to have visited after Jennings left.

But forensic science has now moved on and a re-examination of DNA on all the exhibits in the case, including the cigarette ends, has shown that it was not Mr Kennedy who smoked them. Kennedy always maintained he was at home at the time of the killing.

Last summer Devon and Cornwall police took the rare step of saying they were looking for two unknown visitors. It has also emerged that officers went to the US to interview one of the key prosecution lawyers at the time of the trial over the issue of non-disclosure of several documents considered crucial for the defence. At least one of those is believed to relate to Jennings and the way in which he was eliminated from police inquiries.

There were also two taxi drivers who had been called to the flat who were never traced.

Lawyers now acting for Mr Kennedy submitted a file to the CCRC back in January 2001. It took nearly two years, until November 2002, for the commission to begin its review – which led to the overhaul by Devon and Cornwall police.

The CCRC is now being urged to expedite the matter quickly. Since his imprisonment, Mr Kennedy has been considered a suicide risk. "We are very pleased that Devon and Cornwall seems determined to thoroughly reinvestigate and find Mr Eathorne's killer. But they uncovered enough to cast a doubt on Mr Kennedy's conviction many months ago," said Mr Kennedy's lawyer, Maslen Merchant.

For every day his file sits waiting its turn in the overworked CCRC department, Kennedy, who was 25 when he went to prison, continues to rot in jail.

KENLEY AIRFIELD

Fields of human conflict

KENLEY Airfield in Surrey is the most complete remaining Battle of Britain airfield, its fighter pens are designated "ancient monuments" and the officers' mess is a listed building. It's also an important open space; yet thanks to the Treasury and the communications watchdog Ofcom, it's now been sold to a housing developer.

Originally Kenley was a large open space and golf course owned by the Corporation of London. It was taken over by the Ministry of Defence, which still trains glider pilots there, and it is also used by the local community as valuable open space. English Heritage describes it as a "uniquely important survival".

An enthusiastic Friends of the Airfield group, with the support of both councils overlapped by the land (Croydon and Tandridge), local MPs and the Corporation which still owns neighbouring land, hoped to preserve the whole site as both an historic monument and a pleasant bit of greenery. But their scheme has been foxed by Ofcom, which when it was formed inherited the freehold on some buildings and land at the airfield from the Radiocommunications Agency.

As Ofcom no longer needed the office space it put the buildings – including the RAF Association's historic Portcullis Club – and surrounding 26 acres of woodland and open grass up for sale last year. The Friends raised funds and with the Corporation put in a serious bid. But they couldn't compete with developers and the land was snapped up in December by Comer Homes.

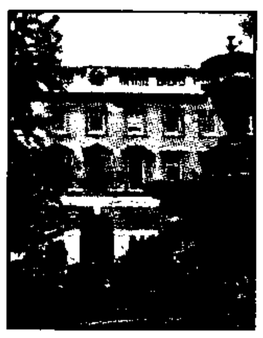
Ofcom tells the *Eye* it would have been happy to sell to the Friends, but was prevented by Treasury rules on how it should dispose of assets. "We understand the Friends' perspective but sadly we are not allowed to exercise the kind of discretion required to enable them to acquire the land if doing so would reduce the total potential returns from disposal," said a spokesman.

Friends' chairman Chris Baguley said the loss of the land was a huge disappointment, but that the group hoped to be able to work with Comer to preserve the area's character.

PS: Kenley isn't the only Battle of Britain airfield at risk. North Weald, in Essex, currently used for all kinds of community activities, is threatened by plans to build 6,000 houses there.

HEALTH PRIVATISATION

Dough!



THE Department of Health finally admitted to having cold feet about the vast expense of the PFI scheme at the Royal London (pictured top) and St Bartholomew's (pictured bottom) hospitals.

The business case was sent to the DoH in September, but it still hasn't been signed off (as noted in *Eye* 1143) and Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt has now ordered a review to consider whether the inclusion of Barts in the scheme is even affordable.

Of course, the chance of any private finance initiative truly passing muster as "affordable" is questionable – as highlighted in the *Eye* ad nauseam. When the Barts and London scheme was announced in 2002, it was said to have a capital cost of £620m, but the bill to the Barts and The London NHS Trust is estimated to be as high as £1.9bn, not to mention the £450,000-a-month interest payments clocked up over the past few months as the trust failed to reach financial close in their deal with Skanska Innisfree.

According to *Building* magazine, some £40m has already been spent on design and planning fees for the Barts side of the project, and if it is axed, the NHS will have to absorb that cost, not to mention the compensation all of the bidders could demand for the cost of putting together bids.

And finally, what about the millions of pounds spent on "enabling schemes", the extra bits of development that Barts has been getting on with while the PFI deal lumbered towards completion, all based on the fact that a huge redevelopment was about to take place? These have been funded by public cash, land sales and donations, including a state-of-the-art £13.5m breast cancer centre paid for in 2004 by the City of London Corporation after a mammoth fundraising campaign. Will all that goodwill be thrown down the drain?

PPP.S.

HEALTH Secretary Patricia Hewitt argues that her NHS reforms are not "about privatisation" or "marketisation" – but everything the government does points in that direction.

Tony Blair, for example, recently appointed Paul Corrigan as his new health special adviser. Corrigan is married to Chief Whip Hilary Armstrong and is a former special adviser to one-time health secretaries Alan Milburn and John Reid. He is also a driving force behind Labour's public private partnerships (PPPs), both in his work at the Department of Health and for the New Local Government Network, a think tank funded by firms seeking public contracts.

Just as Corrigan arrived at Number 10, the Social Market Foundation published a pamphlet he had written calling for more big business involvement in GP services. He suggested that larger organisations of doctors could borrow cash or that health firms and companies like Boots The Chemists should even run local doctor services.

The pamphlet was paid for by the accountancy firm Deloitte and included a glowing foreword by partner Mike Kerr. Kerr himself was "lead adviser to the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise with regard to 'STEPS', the externalisation of their entire estates and associated services" – ie the Mapeley fiasco. It remains to be seen if Kerr and Corrigan can cook up anything for the NHS as imaginative as the deal that transferred UK tax and customs offices to a business based in a sunny tax haven.

CUSTOMS

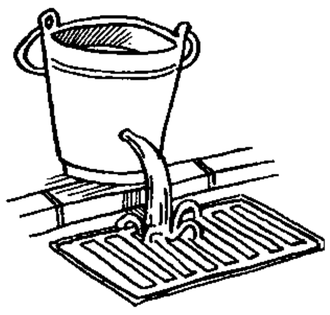
Tax and Bend

NICE to see a seldom-used provision for writing off tax bills – where "strict application of the law would be oppressive and unfair" – being generously employed by the chancellor. But who was the poor soul in need of Gordon Brown's charity? A little old lady on her uppers? Not quite. It was BP, Britain's richest company.

The £1.2bn write-off was revealed in HMRC's latest accounts without identifying the beneficiary, only showing that it went to a company manufacturing a chemical that goes in meths to make it undrinkable. The firm had been using a formula that didn't quite match what was required for duty exemption. But an on-the-ball hack at the *Daily Telegraph* realised that the company must have been BP as it is the only one that makes the chemical.

BP duly owned up but claimed it had told Customs what it was doing. It was still caught out on a technicality, however, and could only be excused the bill if Brown approved the use of the let-off clause.

BP is no stranger to legal tax technicalities, though it is more accustomed to exploiting them to achieve huge tax savings. *Eye* 1140 reported how the company employs "transfer pricing" methods to shift its Russian profits into provinces with very low tax rates, a move that proves highly oppressive to the country's struggling economy. Over here, BP is also doing its bit to bugger up the chancellor's finances as a signatory to the "franked investment income" group litigation order that, as revealed in *Eye* 1148, threatens to blow a £5bn hole in the exchequer. Strangely, when the boot's on the other foot, BP isn't too keen on ignoring legal technicalities, while the government seems oblivious to its double standards.



WATERWORLD

Southern discomfort

SOUTHERN Water had the decency to report itself to the Serious Fraud Office last autumn after 'fessing up to Ofwat that figures it had given to the regulator on its handling of complaints and inquiries did not match up to reality. In a statement in December, Southern said "inconsistencies" were discovered during the installation of a new customer billing system.

Ten staff from customer services have so far been sent home on gardening leave while independent forensic accountants from KPMG and law firm Linklaters investigate the irregularities.

Southern provides water and wastewater removal across Kent, East and West Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight; and its customer service centre receives up to 8,500 telephone calls and 1,600 letters a day. Under the water industry's Guaranteed Standards Scheme, the firm will have to pay out up to £35 to each customer who received sub-standard service, such as taking more than 10 days to handle a query. That could be more than 60,000 households and Southern has said it could face paying up to £2.5m in compensation.

But don't feel too sorry for Southern. The firm made after-tax profits of £67.2m last year, while the 12 board members shared £1.765m between them in salaries. Ofwat has also just given Southern the go-ahead to raise its charges over the next five years, increasing the average bill from £259 to £324 by 2009. Even getting £35 compensation back for rotten customer service won't cover that bill.

SECURE TRAINING

Social careless?

JUST before Christmas the Commission for Social Care Inspection published a damning report into Oakhill Secure Training Centre in Milton Keynes.

Inspectors were critical of many things, including low and unsafe staffing levels, the fact that child protection procedures were not being followed and that physical restraint was not being used or recorded properly. They also highlighted a lack of proper monitoring for children held in isolation, poor education and food and the fact that staff could watch the children taking showers through the doors.

The report said that though inspectors who visited the centre last May were concerned about the number of areas that needed improving, they were also "heartened" by the potential of the new management team which "was determined to drive forward improvements for the benefit of the trainees, the staff and the centre as a whole". What a pity that since then most of the new management team have left.

As the Howard League for Penal Reform has learned, more than 170 staff have come and gone since the centre opened in August 2004, including the new management stars. Frances Crook, Howard League director, said: "These places are a disaster for our most disturbed and vulnerable children and should be closed down."

VAT a shambles

THE new Revenue and Customs Prosecution Office (RCPO), set up partly in response to a series of Customs prosecution scandals, has suffered an early set back: a multi-million pound legal bill from another part of government.

The costs arise from a collapsed VAT fraud trial in which senior Customs officials deliberately failed to disclose crucial evidence in court. As in the bonded warehouse prosecutions (Eyes passim), they concealed intelligence that witnesses they were presenting as truthful were themselves involved in the fraud.

At the end of a 14-week abuse hearing in the high court, Mr Justice Crane concluded that the officials had been prepared to "keep the defence, the judge and ultimately the jury in the dark", before accepting an application from the Legal Aid Commission for the costs of defending the accused, expected to come in at around £3m.

The judge rejected a plea from RCPO's lawyers that from its £35m budget costs of £2m "would have a detrimental effect on the ability of the RCPO to discharge its statutory duties" (or, as he put it, "I do not think I should concern myself with the alleged relative impecuniosity of two public bodies").

The ruling, of a sort almost unheard of against a prosecuting authority, followed what the judge called the "inexcusable" failures of Customs lawyer Andrew Biker, investigator Brian Turner and senior policy official Cedric Andrew. It may open the way for similar actions in relation to the many collapsed Customs prosecutions of recent years, further eating into the ability of the RCPO to "discharge its statutory duties" – ie to nail fraudsters. Meanwhile, Treasury Minister John Healey has announced that the Independent Police Complaints Commission will oversee an investigation into the conduct of the three officials.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

FANTASY football… so why not fantasy finance? Much of what swirls around the business affairs of football clubs, especially those in the money-rich Premiership, easily qualifies.

Before Christmas convicted conman Leslie Greyling, whose crime CV was detailed by the *Eye* in 2003, surfaced reportedly playing a role in a bid to buy Aston Villa. Also said to be involved as a middleman was former bankrupt Paul Garland facing sentencing for deception! Then there was the Sebastian Sainsbury bid for Leeds United which never materialised and the equally illusory Russian bid for Everton.

But perhaps nothing better illustrates this phenomenon than the feeding frenzy surrounding the arrival at lowly Portsmouth of Alexandre Gaydamak, at 29 seemingly en route to topple Croesus. Unlike the previous chancers, Gaydamak has money or access to it. Suggestions that the young Franco-Russian master was already worth £100m and would be spending much of that reviving the unglamorous club immediately followed news of his purchase of a 50 percent share stake for an estimated £15m.

"You pay for the whole thing"

Given what Roman Abramovich has done at Chelsea, perhaps such speculation was understandable. Now every Russian billionaire is said to aspire to own a British soccer club to go with the trophy mansions, yachts and blondes. But Portsmouth is not Chelsea (there is even speculation that Everton – once supposedly the target of the son of an even more seriously rich Russian, Boris Zingarevich – was the preferred choice) and Gaydamak is certainly not Abramovich or remotely close.

So it was not long before even the gullible football hacks were correctly focusing not on Gaydamak junior but Gaydamak senior – Alexandre's considerably better known Russian-born father, Arkadi. Better known, that is, especially to law enforcement agencies in France, Russia and Israel, and not exactly unknown in Britain to both the Serious Farce Office and the Fundamentally Supine Authority.

Both father and son have been keen to make clear that whatever is being spent at Portsmouth is not Arkadi Gaydamak's money. Alexandre is said to have made his own fortune from property and stock-broking. But there is little clear evidence and the world is still awaiting details as promised earlier this month.

What evidence there is, on the other hand, does little to corroborate stories of junior's fortune. The *Daily Telegraph* revealed that his Moscow stock-broking outfit Antanta-Capital Group had assets of just £12m. Company records in Britain showed that Alexandre had been somewhat less than successful with Monarch Fiduciary which had collapsed in 2000 owing £259,000 to the VATman and £464,000 to an offshore Gaydamak-linked trust. Junior had also been involved in four property companies which had been dissolved without seemingly achieving great things.

Suspicions therefore mounted that, despite the denials, the real money at Portsmouth was coming from Arkadi Gaydamak who had by coincidence last year acquired control of a Jerusalem soccer club. Perhaps also because Gaydamak snr talks of making most of his money these days on the Russian stock market and reportedly controls a Russian stockbroker!

The distinction, if there is one, between father and son's money could well come down to the question of family trusts, several of which were formed for the Gaydamaks when they lived in London during the 1990s. Those offshore trusts controlled the companies which bought and sold properties in and around Mayfair and Kensington at that time. The trusts were largely settled by Arkadi Gaydamak with his family as beneficiaries. Father and son have been jointly involved in companies in Britain and Luxembourg.

Several of these trusts were set up in Jersey and the Isle of Man by Edsaco, the company management group founded and run by accountant and Labour donor Ali Sarikhani. Edsaco managed trusts and companies for Gaydamak (Alexandre is even said to have been taken under the Edsaco wing) until there was a falling out around 1999.

The following year Gaydamak went on the run to Israel from an international arrest warrant issued by French magistrates probing a $600m UN sanctions-busting arms deal with Angola during the early 90s. That warrant was confirmed by the British courts and is still valid should Arkadi plan to join the Portsmouth fans at Fratton Park. Gaydamak denies he did anything wrong. He is safe in Israel and Russia and is believed to have an Angolan diplomatic passport for added insurance.

The French investigation spawned an inquiry by the SFO in 2001 which saw it request documents held by Edsaco which by then, after a management buy-out from Swiss bank UBS, had become what is now the Chiltern group. Chiltern voluntarily handed over substantial documentation to the SFO acting on behalf of the French from their offices in London and Jersey. The French suspected Gaydamak had used the proceeds from Angola to buy properties in Britain and abroad.

The Gaydamak connection also came back to haunt Chiltern in 2004 when it established property managers Chiltern Mondiale with Alexandre Gaydamak's former partners in his property ventures under the Mondiale banner. The FSA wanted to know whether the Gaydamaks had any involvement in the new business. They only authorised Chiltern Mondiale after being assured there was no Gaydamak presence.

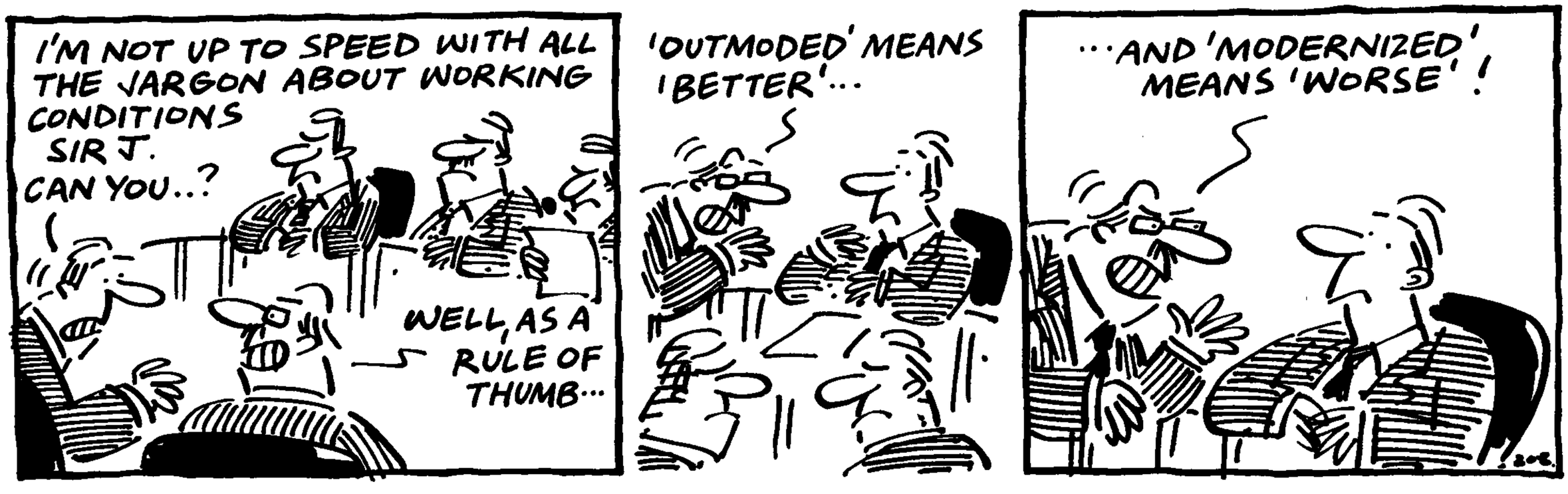
But "Angolagate" is not the only reason for concern about which Gaydamak is really pulling the purse strings at Portsmouth. There is also the money-laundering investigation into the $376m which passed through accounts at Bank Hapoalim in Israel and Sella Bank in Luxembourg with which Arkadi Gaydamak ($50m) and other prominent Russian businessmen have been linked. Gaydamak, who has been interviewed at least twice by Israeli police, declares: "Show me somebody who will tell you that the origins of the money are not clean."

More troubling is Arkadi Gaydamak's admitted relationship with Alimzhan Tokhtakhounov which may help explain the persistent allegations made by law enforcement agencies in France and Russia linking him to Russian organised crime. No evidence has been produced to back up these allegations which Gaydamak has vigorously denied. He sued the French newspaper *Le Monde* as well as the French police and France's equivalent of MI5 whose reports were said to have contained these defamatory claims. The outcome of these actions, if there has yet been one, is unclear. "A Jew and a Russian who succeeds in business always attracts the attention of the media and the authorities, who assume he must be linked to the Mafia or the KGB," Gaydamak told an Israeli newspaper.

A detailed 2002 investigation by the Washington-based Center for Public Integrity into the arms business, in which Arkadi Gaydamak featured, reflected many of these claims quoting French and Dutch intelligence reports and requests from Russia via Interpol. An April 1995 request from Russia via Interpol to the US authorities described Gaydamak as "reported to be one of the members of criminal association having international connections". The CPI report also quoted from a document compiled by the French equivalent of MI6 which linked Arkadi Gaydamak and Tokhtakhounov.

Gaydamak told CPI that he knew Tokhtakhounov socially, found him a sympathetic person but had severed links with him in 1994 when there were reports of his links to organised crime because it "was not good for my image".

Just what those links had been also interested the French magistrates investigating "Angolagate". In particular, two payments totalling more than £50,000 made by Gaydamak from a Swiss bank to Tokhtakhounov in 1994 and 1995. The payments were described by Gaydamak's lawyer to *Le Monde* in 2002 as


THE DIRECTORS
DREDGE & RIGG
I'M NOT UP TO SPEED WITH ALL THE JARGON ABOUT WORKING CONDITIONS SIR J. CAN YOU..?
WELL, AS A RULE OF THUMB...
'OUTMODED' MEANS 'BETTER'...
...AND 'MODERNIZED' MEANS 'WORSE'!

"commissions paid by Arkadi Gaydamak to Alimzhan Tokhtakhounov, the latter had made it possible for him to sell diverse supplies to hotels in Moscow". The lawyer added that Gaydamak "had carried out several perfectly legitimate and now very old operations at various times in the past with Mr Tokhtakhounov, of whom he lost sight about 10 years ago."

Why should there be such interest in Alimzhan Tokhtakhounov? Well, maybe because in 1994 he was described by the FBI as a "very powerful criminal" and in 2002 as "a major figure in international Eurasian organised crime... involved in among other things drug distribution, illegal firearms sales and trafficking in stolen vehicles". He was linked to major crime bosses Semion Mogilevich and Viktor Averin and had been denied a US visa in 1993.

The French authorities, who banned Tokhtakhounov in 1999, were similarly uncomplimentary. He was described in 1998 by the Interior Ministry as "an important member of (Russian) organised crime". Tokhtakhounov moved to Italy where he was described by the Italian police in 2002 as "near the top" of a Moscow crime group with 3,000 members.

Well before the Gaydamaks discovered soccer, "Taivanchik" or "Little Taiwanese" – as he is known because of his appearance – had a great interest in sport and sportsmen. Tokhtakhounov was reputedly a star footballer in his youth in Uzbekistan. After he moved to Moscow and then France he became friends with a number of prominent Russian tennis and ice hockey players. After he moved to Italy he arranged for the Russian national goalkeeper to play for the Italian side Verona.

This interest in sport resulted in Tokhtakhounov's indictment by the Americans in 2002 for an alleged plot to fix two ice skating gold medals at the Winter Olympics earlier that year in Salt Lake City. Tokhtakhounov denied the charges which were based on telephone conversations taped by the Italians who had him under surveillance as part of a huge money-laundering investigation. His extradition to the US was rejected by the top Italian court in 2003.

As Arkadi Gaydamak denies any contacts with Tokhtakhounov since the mid-90s, this will all have come as a complete surprise and justify his decision to sever their relationship. But that the two men once had a relationship at all is unlikely to impress the international football authorities who make much of their concerns about the source of much of the money flooding into top clubs and the possibility of dirty money-laundering or match-fixing. Drug money suspicions already exist around a small Football League club.

But as Arkadi Gaydamak – whose only conviction is for French tax evasion and who has always denied any wrongdoing – insisted to the Center for Public Integrity: "I am a good man." And anyway Portsmouth is nothing to do with him.

THOSE who think the new extradition law is working far too smoothly and hastily in sending British suits to face American justice should consider the lack of progress in the case of that old *Eye* favourite, serial advance fee conman Alan Shephard.

The Americans have been trying to extradite Shephard to face charges of obtaining more than $18m in fees by pretending to be able to arrange loans. Shephard first appeared in court appropriately on 1 April last year. Since then there have been a series of court hearings with no decision while matters such as his sudden poor health and that of his wife are discussed. Shephard is still here and the next hearing is due in March!

'Slicker'

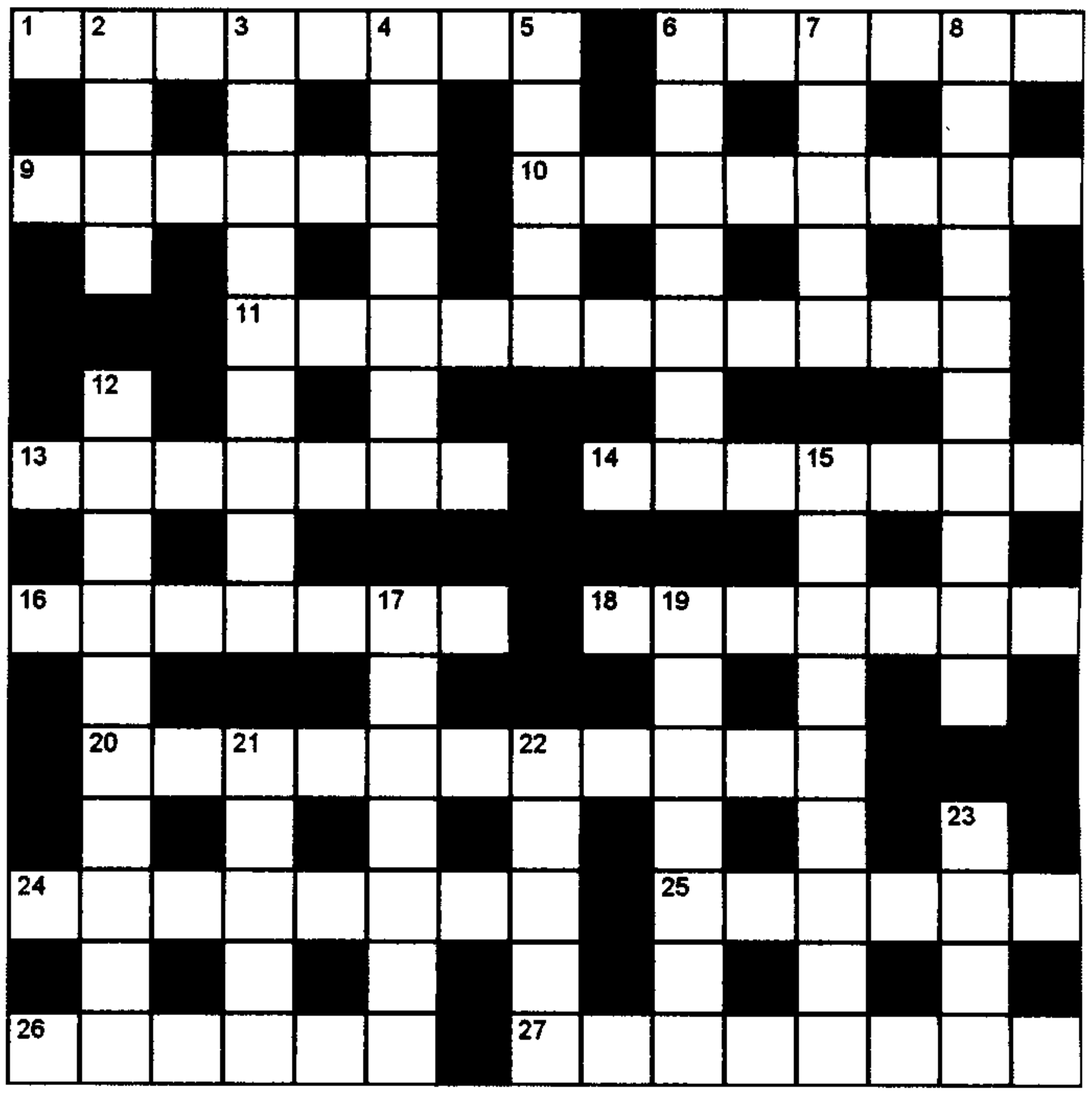
Goals

26 mins: Kirk – tap-in 0-1
57 mins: Elokobi – deflected shit.....1-1
67 mins: Bojic – left-footed cracker ..1-2
89 mins: Garcia – cruel deflection 2-2

Northamptonshire Evening Telegraph

EYE CROSSWORD 305

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 27 January 2006

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

1 Lapse morally, kicking out Labour's leader, the arse! (8)
6 Woman squeezing organ-like appendage – a source of caviare (6)
9 Hack, rotten fraud (3-3)
10 Measures taken by old PM to put on a condom? (8)
11/22dn. Really beat? Come off heroin and reveal sexual nature, old fellow! (4,3,4,3,2)
13 Brenda's gobbled by new heartthrob, a bit like Mr Bean? (7)
14 Curse of western women: getting back with Dicky (4,3)
16 Bicycle tool (7)
18 Hack's dream: Brenda's shit collector? (7)
20 Fellatio with a condom? Criminal activity! (4-7)
24 Conrad: an arse and a pest (5,3)
25 Like committed members needing power to help to get erect (4-2)
26 Got the shakes? Group outside (6)
27 Sun insinuates itself into hallway via this nut, Ray? (8)

DOWN

2/23 "Queer", "butch" am I? That's uncalled-for (1,3,4)
3 Aroused or just expectant? (7,2)
4 Resolved to get female cousin playing around (2,5)
5 Being before court is hard (5)
6 Biographer makes Blair's head get inflated – nothing inside it, though! (7)
7 One who sponges dirty old man holding very end of sponge (5)
8 Olive might bugger off! (3,7)
12 A real oldie, Cyclops, so piss up comes before hospital (10)
15 Bush starts to initiate illegal invasions – a ruler presiding over the dispossession of America (6,3)
17 Curtailed mega-bore, pisspoor Boycott (7)
19 Saint takes crown – "I do an Alastair Campbell!" (7)
21 Aspect of Cherie: extremely thick all round (5)
22 See 11ac.
23 See 2

Crossword 304 winner: JOHN BURLEY

ACROSS: 7 Nawab 9 Smear test 10 Run to seed 11 Expel 12/14 David Cameron 17/4 Total arse 18 Nut 19 Creep 21 Mulatto 22 Intro 24 Gabby 26 Vigilante 28 Blue rinse 29 Norma.

DOWN: 1 In credit 2 Twin 3 Mendacity 5 Ten per cent 6 Stalin 8 Blood clot 9 Spew 13 Vote Labour 15 Macmillan 16 Insolvent 20 Phone-tap 21 Mugabe 23 Ague 25 Yarn 27 Nark.

OMSAIRAM

A fitting end to the ill-fitting British suit

A suitable man to spark a men's clothing revolution

Consider this proposition. Would you rather pay the same sum for a single, off-the-peg, chain store suit cut by a computer and sold to you by a spotty boy who thinks side vents are to be found on a Lambretta scooter, or for two bespoke, custom cut, hand-stitched suits, measured and sold to you by a man for whom suits are a lifetime's passion?

The British clothing chain store has a lot to fear from ***Mr. Raja M Daswani*** of Kowloon. If there were a global ambassador for men's suiting, Mr Daswani, who owns and runs Hong Kong's biggest tailoring business, would be that man. He and his family team measure and make hundreds of suits a week for discerning clients across the world.

Indeed, so successful is ***Mr. Daswani***, that - a little unnervingly as he is measuring you up - he freely admits he doesn't really need to work any more: 'My team is as experienced as I am. But I just love men's suits and I wouldn't feel right sitting at home. It's not a business. It's a mission.

'I love seeing customers walk in a really bad suit that cost them a fortune and walk out in one of our suits that's perfect in every way, made with a good heart in a superior fabric for a half or a quarter as much.'

The price of a Daswani shirt and suit are astonishing. We are talking from £19 (£25 including tax and duty) for a custom shirt and £129 (£169 including tax and duty) for a fully lined, made-to-measure suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £250 (£325 including tax and duty) for a 100 per cent wool, entirely hand finished suit in a British cloth, with every refinement from handmade button holes to knee lining. Even the most expensive suit, made in deluxe superfine wool for £1,500 (£1,950 including tax and duty), costs a third less than it would on **Savile Row**.

Raja Daswani may be based in Hong Kong, but his sartorial mission to the badly dressed and overpaying British customer brings him to the UK as often as once a month. He and his team take over hotel suites in major cities, so British customers can make an appointment and get the full Kowloon Monty.

Measurements and digital photos are taken here and emailed to Hong Kong. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor 6,000 miles away before you've even left the hotel. You can have it couriered within a week or so, or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

It now remains to see whether the Raja revolution, with its inspired mix of artistic flair, entrepreneurial genius and digital technology, will see the end of the off-the-peg British chain store suit. On price alone, it's a sartorial solution that will even please the Suits in accounts.

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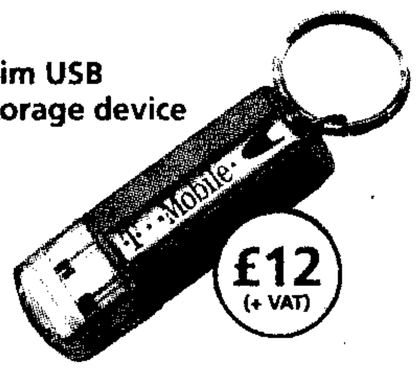

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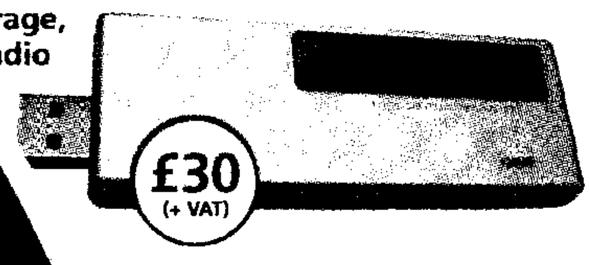

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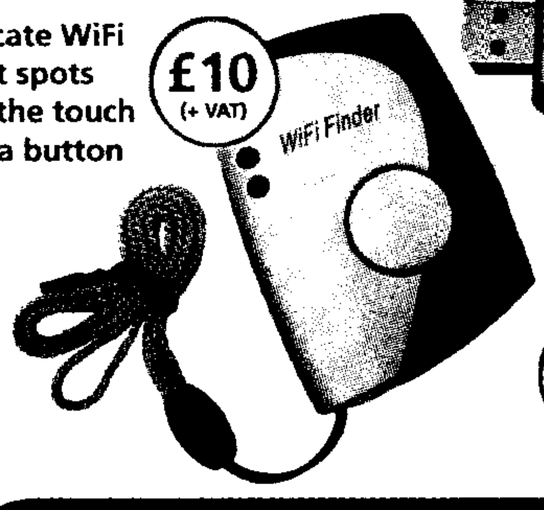

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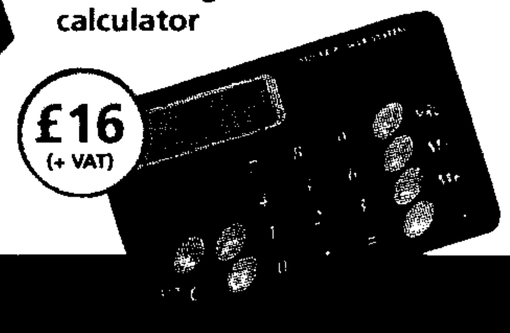

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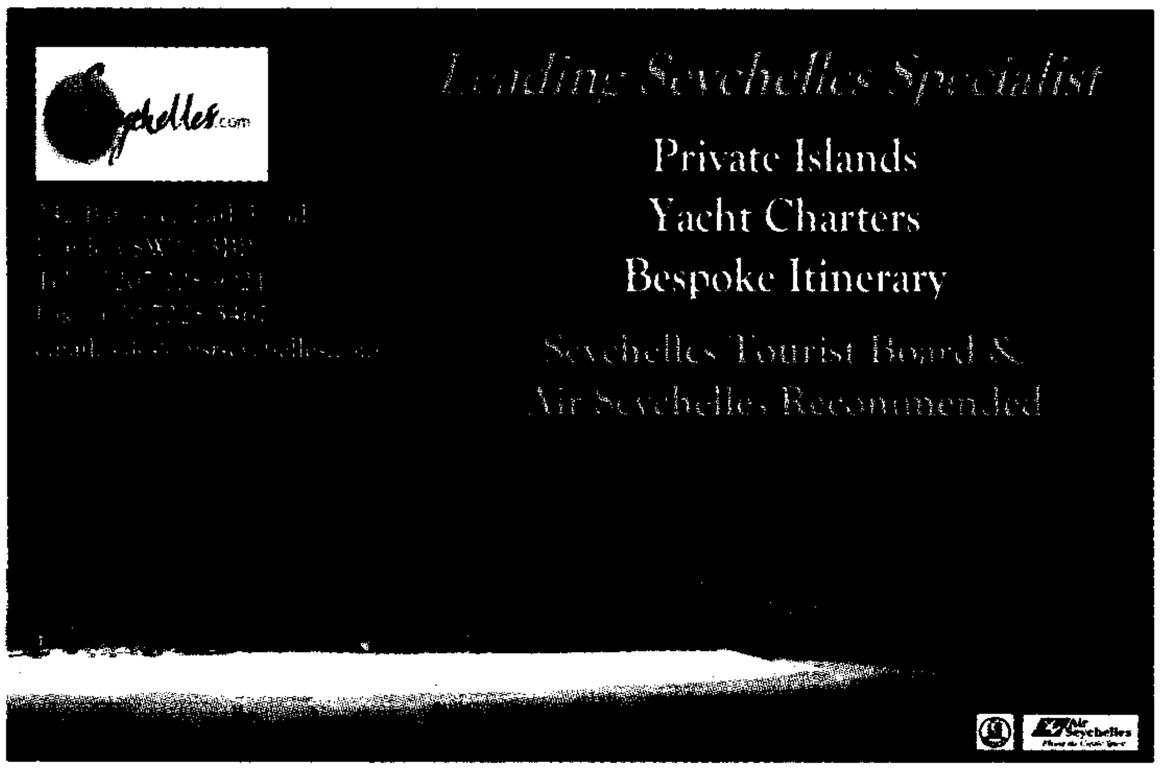

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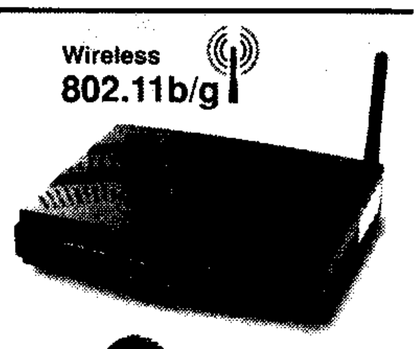

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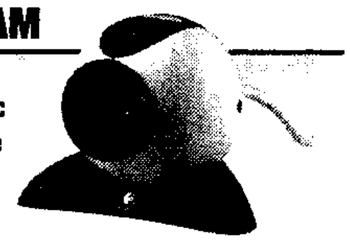

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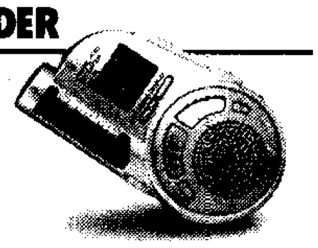

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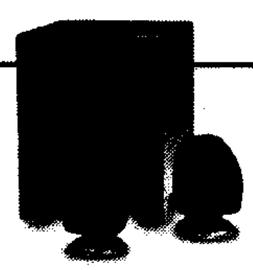

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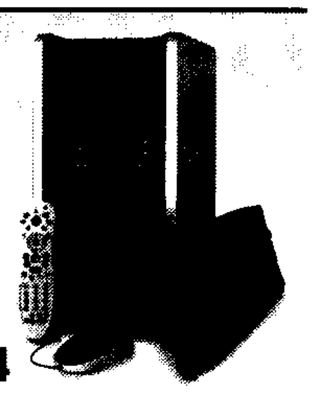

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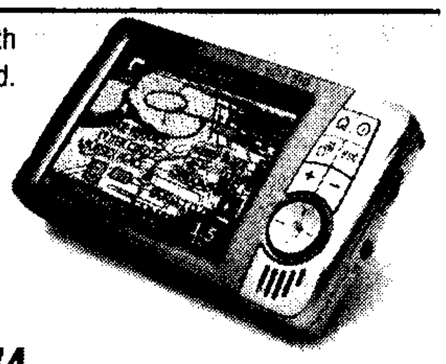

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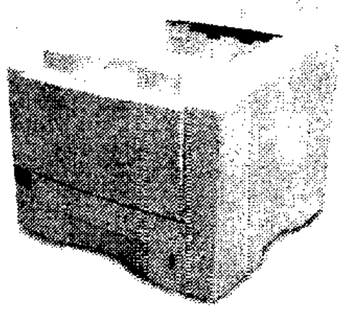

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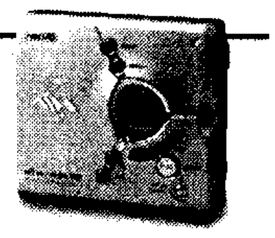

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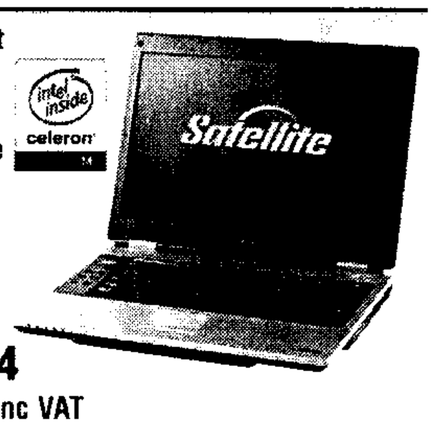

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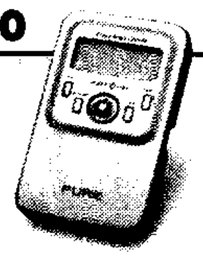

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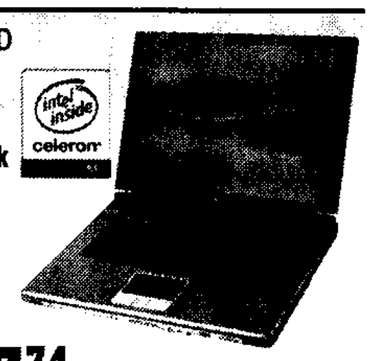

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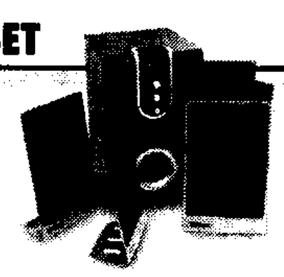

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[redacted]

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PLEASE HELP. Urgently need £17,500 for life-enhancing procedure for our son. Help us make his New Year special. Thank you. S/C: 309971. A/C: 01077400.

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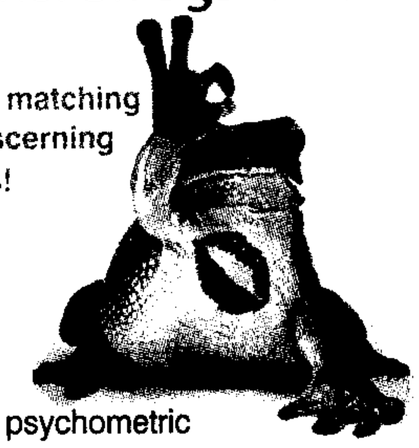
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